



Ashburnham

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2021 Update

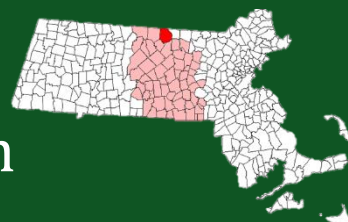


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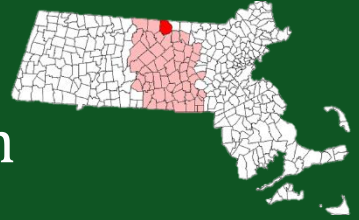
Terry Maguire



Ashburnham

Open Space and Recreation Plan

2021 Update



April 2023 – Final Draft
Ashburnham Open Space & Recreation Committee
32 Main Street
Ashburnham, MA 01430

~ *Dedication* ~

To the Townspeople of Ashburnham:

If you've ever suddenly roused a ruffed grouse from under a low-lying hemlock bough in some dark hollow, just as the sun slanted in and the morning mist rose, along a silent, sinuous, seldom travelled trail, deep in the woods, and wondered... "What was louder and faster, the rhythmic beating of its wings or of my heart?"

If you've ever stood still looking upon a deer from behind a great oak in a small opening in the woods, close enough to see it blink and hear it inhale the air, deeply, searching for your scent, and wondered... "Which stood straighter, the deer's white tail or the hair on the back of your neck?"

If you've ever waded through cool, waist deep water across a narrow, gravel bottomed bar on a hot mid-summer day and ascended the tree-roots like a ladder onto a secluded sandy island of blueberry bushes and towering pines to enjoy an afternoon of basking atop pine needles and swimming in the sun and wondered... "Is there is any better way to spend a summer day?"

If you've ever hiked to the top of Great Watatic and gazed out upon the land, full of trees and dotted with lakes and ponds, straight across the green, rolling hills and clear, blue horizon of the sky and its white, wispy clouds and wondered, in amazement... "How does such a vast, undisturbed swath of great, green wilderness remain here, among the dense development of North Central Massachusetts?"

If you've ever taken an evening stroll out to Lincoln Pond, arriving at the wet shoreline just before dusk, fish rising as the sun was setting, and listened to the buzz, croak, and call of nature's chorus while everything around you turned from vibrant green and blue to muted pink, then grey, and wondered... "How can so much activity, sound, and color could become so still, silent, and dull, so suddenly?"

...Then the darkness and the skyful of stars, oh the countless, sparkling stars!

If you have ever connected with nature in these or some other way, then you have experienced the benefits and known the value of Ashburnham's open spaces and outdoor recreation. For those of you, we present this Plan... so that you can continue to know and enjoy such experiences.

Or, if you have not yet experienced these joys, we present this Plan for you too... so that you may have the opportunity to experience those wonders, and feel the joy sometime in the future, and so that you may truly understand and know the benefits of open space.

This Plan is dedicated to all the devoted people who truly love the land and, especially, to those who have, or continue to volunteer their time stewarding the land or serving on various land use boards, committees, and commissions, thus enabling, facilitating, and marshaling the functions of local government, in service of not just the Town's *people*, but also the land itself, and the common benefits, shared interests, and mutual dependence of those things... Without *them*, *they* may cease to function.

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SECTION 1



Plan Summary



Section 1: Plan Summary

This Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023 Update aims to define and illustrate the past, present, and future significance of open space and recreation in Ashburnham. Through the identification and prioritization of lands, establishment of visions, goals, objectives, and actions, it serves to inform and coordinate a process that recognizes the importance of Open Space and Recreation and encourages the protection, wise use, and management of lands and resources in a way that provides and promotes opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the conservation of Ashburnham's natural, cultural, and historical resources, and encourages the adoption and implementation of sustainable development practices for a more resilient community..

Ashburnham has remarkable open space. An abundance of water resources, in the form of rivers, brooks, lakes, ponds, and wetlands contributed to the town's early milling history and still serve as a valuable natural resource to the Town and region. The Town's vast forested lands were also important to the town's early history to manufacture chairs and produce "pearl ash", a material of critical importance in those days for blowing glass, and of in high demand due to the shortage of "good wood" in England. Ashburnham's forests, both then and now, were also critical for the protection and provision of the Town and region's abundant water resources. Mount Watatic and the Town's other hills, mountains, and ridges have always provided amazing views of the surrounding area. Such high-points and their view-sheds, which at one time were a necessity of strategic importance to the safety of early settlements, offer one-of-a-kind scenic vistas and account for some of the region's finest recreational opportunities, including the revered Midstate Trail. These three things – water, forests, and high-lands – defined the land and shaped its settlement, development, character, and heritage. Given this, residents of Ashburnham have always placed great emphasis on open space and the relationship between Ashburnham's unique physical and cultural character. As Ezra Stearns said in his 1887 History of Ashburnham:

"The altitude of the town and the bold and rugged outlines of the landscape, are the elements of scenery unsurpassed in beauty and grandeur. These features of nature are a living inspiration and enjoyment to all who inhabit here, and treasured among golden memories are the visions of matchless sublimity which delighted the childhood and youth of every absent son and daughter of Ashburnham."

Ashburnham is known as the "Town of Many Lakes", and its water resources have shaped the past and present value its residents place on natural resources and the protection of watersheds. Lakes created by dams to power the milling industry 200-300 years ago now harbor many State-listed rare species, while abutting wetlands provide critical habitat. These water bodies are shaped by their contributing watershed landscapes made up of the numerous hills and valleys of the Town. The Town and its land, those hills and valleys, comprise the source of three major watershed basins associated with the Nashua, Souhegan, and Millers Rivers. The Nashua and Souhegan Rivers drain in opposite directions, but both eventually discharge to the Merrimack River which then enters the Gulf of Maine between Salisbury and Newburyport. The Millers River drains to the north-west through Winchendon then follows the path of the Mohawk Trail eventually entering the Connecticut River just downstream of the French King Bridge. The Connecticut River there turns west for a few miles, and then south again at Great Falls near the former native fishing place and traditional village of Peskeomskut. From there the great river flows south through the Pioneer

Valley of Massachusetts and Connecticut, past Hartford and, finally enters Long Island Sound at Old Lyme and Old Saybrook. While hard to imagine, it is true that rainfall and runoff originating in Ashburnham contributes to the water quality and streamflow of at least 50 other towns in Massachusetts, another 11 in New Hampshire, and 23 more in Connecticut as the waters of the Souhegan, Millers, and Nashua Rivers flow to the ocean through the region's two largest rivers, the Merrimac and Connecticut. That means that protecting the land and watershed resources of Ashburnham contributes to the protection of the downstream water resources of 84 communities, 10 counties, three states, and two major marine ecosystems – the Gulf of Maine and Long Island Sound. The importance of that fact, and the great role that Ashburnham plays in the protection of the region's water resources, should not be understated, or underestimated.

The 1,832-foot (Mean Sea Level Datum) Mount Watatic is Ashburnham's most notable scenic and recreational resource. Known for its blueberry-topped summit and stunning views of the region, Mount Watatic also boasts the beginning- (or ending-, depending on your preferred direction of travel) point of two regional, multi-state trails, the Midstate Trail and the Wapack Trail. Much of Mount Watatic's landscape has been protected as conserved land, including its summit and much of the forests encompassing its surrounding slopes. Most recently, over 200-acres of its south slope within Ashburnham and Ashby was acquired and protected by the North County Land Conservation Trust, in early 2021. The many acres of conserved forest lands provide an abundance of protected wildlife habitat and unique natural communities, including habitat for rare and endangered species of plants and animals. This protected forest landscape constitutes a major addition to the existing conserved, forested, lands blanketing the mountain on all sides.

Watatic, and the extensive forested lands (both protected and unprotected) extending from its base and buffering the Midstate and Wapack trails and slopes of the Wapack-to-Wachusett range, form a forested ridgeline and surrounding buffer of (relatively) undeveloped forest-landscape. Such a landscape of similar expanse is otherwise almost unknown in most parts of the surrounding Montachusett Region of North Central Massachusetts and throughout southern New England.

Other areas of the Town are recognized for their historical value, including areas with connections to the pre-revolutionary period of Massachusetts colonial history and settlement, industrialization, and the Civil War era. Collectively, this open space embodies the character of Ashburnham – a peaceful, scenic, rural, and historic Town in the highlands of north-central Massachusetts, the source of the region's water.

Large undeveloped tracts of land still exist in Ashburnham and many of those parcels have limited or no protection. Understanding the value of forest lands for natural resources protection, timber resources, climate resiliency, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation, Ashburnham recognizes the need for open space planning. In addition to developing this current OSRP update, Ashburnham has worked progressively toward the vision, goals, objectives, and recommended actions of the previous 2014 OSRP Update and continues to work on revisions to its general and zoning bylaws, including the Water Supply Protection (Overlay) District Bylaw, to protect water resources and maintain compliance with MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations. Such measures will help to encourage sound, sustainable development practices and prevent poorly planned, environmentally and economically unsustainable, or otherwise detrimental residential

growth that may unduly fragment, degrade, or deplete the community's natural and fiscal resources.

The development of this Plan, and its characterization of the values, needs, and desires of the Community, was informed by a public survey and resident and stakeholder input. In the 2021 Open Space & Recreation Public Survey, residents expressed the aspects of open space and recreation they most valued and provided their opinions of the things that are most important, desired, or needed to ensure the continued protection, use, and benefit of open space and recreation lands in Ashburnham. In this, and previous surveys, the community identified the need to protect natural areas (e.g., water resources and wildlife habitat), various types of recreation areas, unique, scenic viewing areas or vistas, agricultural areas, and sites of historical or cultural value.

To protect, promote, and improve Ashburnham's open space and recreational lands and opportunities, including associated natural, cultural, and historical resources, the Town has refined and revised its previously identified broad-scale open space goals. These goals have been re-established to illustrate the community's current vision and the Town's continued commitment to Open Space & Recreation Planning. The broad-scale open space and recreation goals have been established to address current community needs, inform goals, objectives, and actions, and guide and facilitate the development and implementation of this Plan. Ashburnham's current open space and recreation "Community Vision", established here and presented more completely within Section 6, includes a set of three broad-scale, open space and recreation goals, expressed by the following Vision Statements:

- I. Protect Natural Resources** using a balanced approach that identifies environmentally and ecologically sensitive or important areas and prioritizes the most valued areas for protection while identifying areas suitable for sustainable development and smart growth.
- II. Improve and Maintain Passive and Active Recreational Opportunities** to best meet current Community needs and provide high-quality recreational opportunities for all.
- III. Preserve the Rural and Historical Character of the Town** through the adoption of sustainable land-use practices and a proactive, inclusive, community-based approach to Open Space & Recreation Use, Stewardship, Planning, and Management.

The 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan Update recommends specific steps or action-items to further the Town's aspirations for its open space and recreation lands and opportunities. These actions, presented within Section 9 as a 7-Year Action Plan, are rooted in the Town's goals and the residents' desires for Ashburnham. The Action Plan outlines recommended steps to provide funding for the protection of natural resources and recreational opportunities, prioritize and manage related land acquisition, encourage environmental stewardship and community involvement with open space and recreation, and otherwise promote or facilitate the successful achievement of the Vision, Goals, and Objectives of this Plan.

Ashburnham's 2023 OSRP Update Action Plan is based on the expressed Community Vision (Section 6), Needs (Section 7), and Goals (Section 8), particularly an interest maintaining and improving its current parks, playgrounds, trails, and related recreational opportunities. Relative to trails, the Plan also aims to address the community's interest in continuing to develop and improve upon the Ashburnham Rail Trail, and specifically to pursue and implement connections between

downtown and South Ashburnham and to pursue additional connections to neighborhoods, parks, playgrounds, schools, and other existing open space and recreation areas and amenities, including potential connections to existing and potential rail trails such as the North Central Pathway and the Cheshire Branch. Further, the Plan proposes actions aimed at responding to the community's desire for protecting water resources and providing public waterfront access for water-based recreation such as swimming, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, paddleboarding, and fishing.

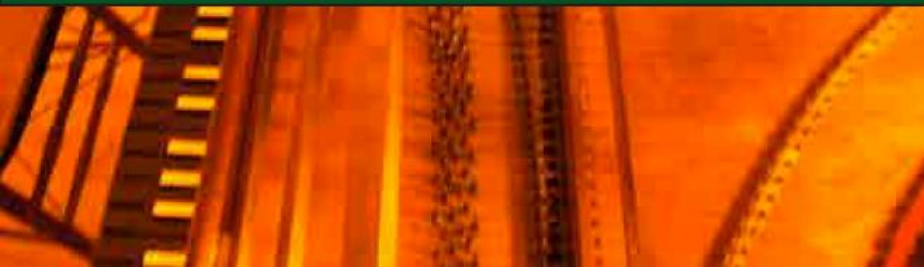
Through thoughtful consideration, steadfast dedication, and a coordinated, town-wide effort toward the implementation of this Plan, and through the recognition of the importance of its guiding principles, Ashburnham may continue to meet the defined needs of its residents by enhancing, promoting, and protecting appropriate, prioritized open space and recreational resources and hence, meeting the desires and needs of the community and maintaining the Town's rural, cultural, and historical character that is so valued by its people.

Identifying and protecting Ashburnham's critical open space resources and recreational opportunities will bring new development to appropriate areas while preserving essential aspects of Ashburnham's character.

SECTION 2



Introduction



Section 2. Introduction

Ashburnham has a unique natural tranquility which is cherished by residents, fostered by over twenty lakes and ponds, by scenic mountaintops, and by its historic farm districts. Recreational opportunities abound as Ashburnham plays host to numerous hikers, birders, skiers, hunters, snowmobilers, and summer camps. Whether open space is conserved for recreation, wildlife, or economic viability, it is an essential element of Ashburnham's character as a rural Massachusetts town.

A. Statement of Purpose

An abundance of water resources, in the form of rivers, brooks, lakes, ponds, and wetlands contributed to the town's early milling history. In the past, Ashburnham's forests protected the contributing watersheds of the Town's rivers and streams and the Town's wetlands helped to control and stabilize flows year-round, ensuring a predictable, stable, sediment-free flow of water to Ashburnham's mills and all of the downstream mills of the more industrialized communities along the Nashua and Millers Rivers. Today, Ashburnham's forested watersheds continue to provide benefits to the Town and region through the protection of local water supplies and the protection of instream flows and water quality for several of the region's rivers affecting water quality, quantity, and stream ecology of many towns in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut along the Merrimack and Connecticut River Valleys, benefitting the ecosystems of Long Island Sound and Gulf of Maine.

Ashburnham's natural resources, primarily its undeveloped forests, wetlands, and waterbodies, provide environmental, ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values and benefits not only for town residents, but also for the residents of many surrounding towns and the region. Identifying and protecting Ashburnham's critical open space resources and recreational opportunities will bring new development to appropriate areas while preserving essential aspects of Ashburnham's character. Ashburnham continues to recognize the importance and maintain its interest in conserving the town's natural resources. In addition to the Open Space and Recreation Plan of 2001 and the OSRP 2014 Update, Ashburnham has accomplished much over the past twenty years relative to open space and natural resources planning and protection. For example, in 2006, the Wetlands Protection Bylaw was adopted to ensure greater protection of the Town's numerous wetlands. Rules and regulations implementing the Bylaw were subsequently adopted in February 2007 and revised in March 2019.

Ashburnham's scenic natural resources are also an integral part of the town's economy, character, and culture. The Midstate Trail plays a major role as a recreational corridor transecting the Town from south to north before joining the Wapack Trail and the Mount Watatic State Reserve. The open summit of Mount Watatic, the only protected bald mountain in Worcester County, is popular regional hiking destination offering expansive, long-distance views of the surrounding landscape and across the horizon, all the way to the Boston skyline on a clear day.

While much of Ashburnham's current landscape consists of large, tracts of undeveloped forests many of those lands are currently not conserved or have only limited protection through programs like the Chapter 61 Forest Tax program which provides limited protection for a designated period

of time subject to a landowners willingness to maintain it in a “current use” of at least 10-acres of forested land that meets the guidelines of the program and its established standards for forest, open space, and recreation. Such lands are only “protected” for the designated period of time or only as long as the landowner remains committed to maintaining the land in its “current use” and participating in the program. Moreover, the majority of permanently protected parcels are not contiguous meaning that they often lack connections between them that are suitable for wildlife passage and habitat needs. Such connections are imperative for wildlife and can act as recreational corridors for people. Potential for such connections exist in Ashburnham thanks to a varied matrix of conservation and open space lands, properties consisting of State-owned lands, Ashburnham State Forest lands, various conservation trust and organization (e.g., Mass Audubon Society) lands, and relatively small parcels of Town-owned land. Lasting protection of ecologically valuable, scenic, functional, and productive open space is necessary to preserve Ashburnham’s many natural assets far into the future.

The large-scale loss of open, forested lands to commercial, industrial, or residential development poses a major threat to open space in Massachusetts. Ashburnham’s limited area of land zoned for commercial and industrial land uses considerably reduces the potential impact that threat. In recent years, another threat, the development of commercial solar arrays, or “solar fields” has resulted in a substantial loss of forested land in Massachusetts. In particular, developers have targeted many rural, forested communities where land is more affordable, more plentiful, and more often available in larger parcels than in more densely developed urban areas. However, Ashburnham has also managed to evade that threat due to the fact that it relies on its own established municipal light company, not a regional or national electric company, to provide electricity to its customers, and therefore does not have the interest, capacity, or allowances to for such commercial solar projects. In 2014, the Ashburnham Municipal Light Plan (AMLP), in an effort to produce and supply clean, renewable energy to its customers, developed a 20-acre municipal photovoltaic solar energy-producing array. This system was, at the time, unique and forward-thinking in that it utilized a dual-technology – traditional photovoltaic modules with centralized inverters combined with intelligent, adaptive photovoltaic modules with integrated redundant inverters and smart technologies. The technology allowed AMLP to maximize efficiency and produce more energy, more often, using less area, with less concern for the effects of panel shading, essentially reducing the number of trees that needed to be cleared, thereby decreasing the financial and environmental costs, and increasing the financial and environmental benefits and overall community value.

In Ashburnham the primary form of development is residential development, which could lead to losses of open space lands if not carefully planned and implemented with sustainability in mind. Be it expanding metropolitan populations, people seeking lower costs of living and beautiful scenery, or some other reason, multiple communities within the Montachusett Region, including Ashburnham, have seen considerable residential growth in recent years. For example, the most recent assessment of statewide development and urban sprawl conducted by Mass Audubon (Losing Ground, 2020) found that, between 2012 and 2017, the Town of Ashburnham experienced the development of 99-acres of land (86th out of 351 Massachusetts cities and towns), equivalent to a rate of development of 2.4 acres per square-mile. This figure represents an increase of more than 37-acres or approximately 1-acre per square-mile more than the previously documented time-period (2005-2013). While 99-acres of developed land may not seem like a lot, it was still higher

than 75% of the communities statewide during the same time-range. Between 2012 and 2017 Worcester County saw more acres developed (5,360) than any other county statewide, with 1,942 acres of land developed in the Montachusett Region alone.¹ Ashburnham possesses a strong school system and a variety of natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources, or livability characteristics people desire in a community. These things make it a desirable place to live and a desirable place to want to live. The possibility for residential growth exists and, therefore, the need for sound planning also exists.

Awareness of recent development trends can help a town prepare for potential future growth through the promotion and implementation of smart growth, sustainable development principals in areas where such growth can be sustained with the least environmental impacts. Identifying environmentally sensitive lands or areas possessing important open space and recreation attributes, such as those identified within Section 5 of this Plan may then be prioritized for protection and discouraged from development. Without such awareness and preparedness, unmanaged, poorly planned, or unwisely sited residential development could negatively impact natural resources and the Town's rural character that has drawn people to Ashburnham in the first place. Some threats to valuable public resources and municipal budgets, often associated with the loss of open space lands, such as the degradation of water resources and increased demand for municipal services disproportionate to revenue generated through taxes, can also be avoided through careful planning and thoughtful administration and enforcement of local and state laws and regulations.

Imploring a balanced approach that incorporates the methodological prioritization of lands for protection and the careful, coordinated, creation and enforcement of protective land use bylaws and leads to thoughtful, responsible, sustainable, smart-growth approaches to development is critical to protecting and preserving Ashburnham's natural resources and rural character. To that end, this plan and its inventory of lands, identification of community needs, and recommended open space and recreation actions provides a tool to help guide sound municipal decision-making. Such a guidance tool may then be utilized to facilitate increased sustainability and protection of important natural resources through the promotion and protection of open space and recreation lands and the continued development and application of sustainable, smart-growth principles and practices.

In a more general sense, this Plan, and others like it provide important information and strategies to help towns maintain a balanced, well-informed approach to land use decision-making resulting in appropriately sited development and considerable amounts of enviro-nomic, value-based, protected open space lands capable of conserving and provisioning important natural resources now, and into the future.

Below is a summary of some of those strategies, activities, and land use decision-making tools recently enacted and utilized by the Town of Ashburnham:

The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Bylaw, and associated rules/regulations (Revised September 2006), requires developers to prepare an OSRD plan in addition to a conventional development plan when applying for development permits. The OSRD plans have

¹ Mass Audubon. 2020. Losing Ground 2020: Statistics (Town of Ashburnham). <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/policy-advocacy/local-climate-resilient-communities/losing-ground/statistics/town/ashburnham>

smaller minimum lot and frontage dimensions, which allow houses to be clustered together so that remaining land can be set aside as open space. Unfortunately, many developers still choose to develop land, either due to cost or convenience, along existing roadways utilizing existing frontages and not requiring subdivision of lots. Such development, consistent with local and state subdivision control laws, falls under the “Approval Not Required (ANR)” guidelines and, as such is not subject to formal review by the Planning Board. Reviewing the OSRD Bylaw to determine if there are ways in which it could be improved to further encourage or incentivize its use by developers and thereby more frequently utilized to reduce rural sprawl and fragmentation of open space could prove beneficial on both fronts. Work, relative to this and other protective bylaws toward this is currently being undertaken by the Bylaw Review Committee, a newly formed and active committee of dedicated members representative of zoning, planning, code enforcement, and other relevant municipal disciplines and interests.

A **Scenic Roads Bylaw**, with rules/regulations adopted in September 2006, helps protect historic and scenic roadways by reviewing alterations to roadside appearance from tree cutting, removing stone walls, and re-surfacing. Currently, there are thirteen Scenic Roads within Ashburnham.

A **Low Impact Development (LID) Bylaw**, and implementing rules/regulations (Adopted May 2008), serves to help guide developments by requiring landowners to examine options such as permeable pavement and vegetated swales to control stormwater runoff. The Ashburnham Source Water Protection Plan (2006) provides guidelines for the protection of the Town’s public water supply, Upper Naukeag Lake Reservoir. As previously noted, the town is working on revisions to its Water Supply Protection (Overlay) District Bylaw to maintain compliance with DEP regulations.

The **Right to Farm Bylaw** (Adopted May 2010) encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agriculturally based economic opportunities, and protects farmlands within the Town of Ashburnham.

In 2018, an **Adult Use Marijuana Facilities Bylaw** was adopted in accordance with State regulations to minimize adverse effects of such facilities on residential neighborhoods, schools, and other land uses.

Further, an updated **Sign Bylaw** was adopted in 2019. The purpose of this update was to maintain and enhance the aesthetic environment of the Town, to encourage the Town's ability to attract sources of economic development and growth, to improve pedestrian and traffic safety, to minimize the possible adverse effect of signs on nearby public and private property, and to help preserve the historical character of the downtown area.

At Town meeting in 2022 upon recommendation of the Planning Board, in conjunction with the Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), the Wetlands and Watershed Protection Overlay District was eliminated by vote. The provisions and requirements of that overlay district, established in 1973, were deemed to be duplicative, divergent, and ambiguous by the Commission and ZBA. District elimination would consolidate authority with the Commission where all proposed actions would be subject to uniform regulation under the **Massachusetts**

Wetlands Protection Act and State regulations, as well as the Ashburnham **Wetlands Protection Bylaw** and associated rules and regulations.

Several **recreational trail projects** intended to create greater connectivity and ease of access were implemented, as well. Most notable are protections granted to parts of the Midstate Trail, and the ongoing Ashburnham Rail Trail project that involves converting an old railroad bed into a recreational trail connecting the downtown with South Ashburnham. In conjunction with The Trustees of Reservations (TTR), Ashburnham also worked to preserve 296 acres in Ashburnham, Ashby, and Fitchburg as part of the Jewell Hill Conservation Area, with the Conservation Commission holding the Conservation Restriction on the 85 acres in Ashburnham. Besides preserving a century-old farm, the land acquisition provides continuing protection to the City of Fitchburg's public water supply.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023 Update builds on the recent work done to protect Ashburnham's open space. The Town is committed to identifying and prioritizing land for potential acquisition based on environmental, ecological or recreational value, suitability, and integrity. In other instances, landowners should be made aware of **Chapter 61 programs, Conservation Restrictions, or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions** and other opportunities or programs available to landowners to protect their land and important natural resources, habitats, corridors, or other important landscape features occurring on their land. More recreational access and facilities are needed. Recreational needs should play a central role in the prioritization and potential protection of lands in Ashburnham over the next 7-years. The ultimate goal of this OSRP is to preserve the character and quality of Ashburnham by creating a connected network of conservation and recreation lands. Protecting open space in Ashburnham also protects resources for people, wildlife, bordering towns, and the greater region, particularly with respect to **outdoor recreation** and **watershed protection**, two critical factors for which Ashburnham provides a service to the entire region that far exceeds the expectations of residents and visitors, alike.

B. Planning Process and Public Participation

Recognizing the need to implement the State- approved 2014 OSRP and to plan for preparation of the next OSRP Update, the Ashburnham Select Board established an Open Space & Recreation Committee in early 2019. This committee, chaired by Lorraine DeSouza of the Ashburnham Conservation Trust (ACT), included Marshall Dennis and Chris Picone (Conservation Commission), Gary Howland (ACT), Anna Wilkins (North County Land Trust), and Cec Snow (Ashburnham resident). Since its establishment, the OSRC held over 25 public meetings to review Actions and Priorities set forth in the OSRP 2014 Update and new data for inclusion in the OSRP 2023 Update.

A draft update of the Ashburnham Open Space and Recreation Plan Update was prepared by representatives of the Ashburnham Open Space and Recreation Committee with input from Town staff, including elected officials, department heads, and board, committee, and commission members, in addition to interested local stakeholders, and with public participation and input of interested citizens. Town resident Janet Morrison, an experienced, private land conservation consultant, volunteered her time and expertise assisting the Committee with the development of maps and providing relevant information to the Plan.

In October 2021, the OSRC distributed the Ashburnham Open Space & Recreation Planning Survey, as reviewed and approved by the Select Board in October 2021. The survey was offered online via posting on the Town's webpage which also generated an automated email notification to enrolled residents. In addition, paper copies of the survey were made available in Town Hall, the Public Library, and the Ashburnham Market Place. The survey was made available to the public from mid-October to mid-November 2021. Survey results (described in Sections 6 and reflected throughout OSRP 2023 Update) were analyzed publicly presented and incorporated in to the Plan and are reflected in the community visions, needs, goals and objectives, and actions.

The Draft Plan was submitted to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for review by the Committee in the spring of 2022. Upon review of the 2023 Draft OSRP Update by the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services (EOEEA, DCS) in May of 2022, a conditional approval was granted until May of 2029, pending the address of several (10) items listed by EOEEA, DCS in a letter dated May 4, 2022. To address the comments, enhance public and stakeholder participation, make necessary revisions, and secure full approval, the Town of Ashburnham contracted with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) in September of 2022. MRPC was tasked with conducting a full review of the plan to address the EOEEA comments and consider comments presented by the Ashburnham Planning Board in June of 2022, and finally to conduct necessary meetings and make necessary revisions to the Draft Plan for final submission by the Town.

As part of MRPC's review and revisions, additional input was gathered through public meetings of the Open Space Committee and other Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees, and a public forum and stakeholder visioning session held on November 30, 2022. The public forum and stakeholder visioning session was held as a public info and input session to review and recommend important Visions, Goals, and Objectives of the Plan and included attendance by members of the public, representatives of various Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees, and invited Stakeholders of interested entities including, representatives of youth sports recreational programs. A broad range of stakeholders and community groups including State Agency representatives, and representatives of interested non-governmental non-profit organizations, conservation organizations, sportsman's clubs, and watershed associations were invited to attend. The forum was well attended and resulted in an informative and productive discussion and stakeholder input.

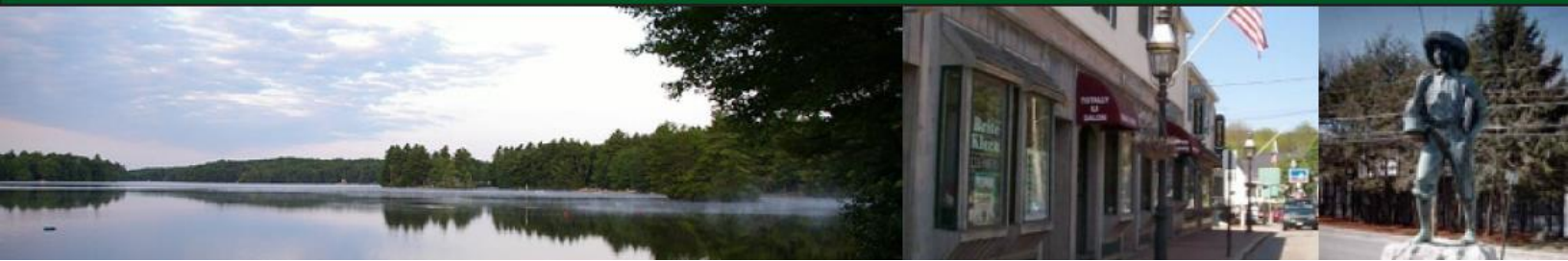
Finally, as a last step in the planning process and to provide one final opportunity for public information and input prior to resubmission of a final draft, a public forum was conducted on April 19, 2023. The public forum included a public info session and public input session. The public info session consisted of a presentation by MRPC of the final draft of the Plan and its corresponding maps. The public input session provided an opportunity for public comment and discussion. As part of the review of the final draft of the Plan, a 21-day public review and comment period was conducted 1-week prior to the public forum and for 2-weeks following the forum. The public forum and comment period were advertised on the Town webpage, a notice and agenda were posted on the public meetings board within Town Hall, and a notice was advertised within a local newspaper, the Sentinel and Enterprise. In addition, an announcement and flyer were posted on the "News" section of the Town's website and on the Open Space and Recreation Committee's

webpage. The flyer was also distributed and posted at the local library, Town Hall, Senior Center, AllTown Market, Tweedo's Variety, and The Tavern on Central.

Protecting open space in Ashburnham also protects resources for people, wildlife, bordering towns, and the greater region, particularly with respect to outdoor recreation and watershed protection, two critical factors for which Ashburnham provides a service to the entire region that far exceeds the expectations of residents and visitors, alike.

SECTION 3

Community Setting



Section 3. Community Setting

A. Regional Context

Ashburnham is located in north-central Massachusetts within the Worcester Plateau ecoregion. This land area occurs at a higher elevation than the Northeast Coastal Plain to its east and the Connecticut River Valley to its west, and therefore much colder, particularly at its northern end.¹ It is dominated by transitional hardwood forests, with a mixture of the more northern beech-maple-birch communities, and oak-hickory woods of warmer southern climes. The northern part of the plateau features several glacial monadnocks (i.e., remnant mountains that rise abruptly out of a plain typically composed of resistant bedrock that was left standing as the surrounding rock and soil was eroded away by glaciers), as well as acidic wetlands and peatlands.

Ashburnham also is the most eastern of the three towns in Worcester County, whose population has evolved from a centralized village-oriented community, as shown in **Figure 1A** (Ashburnham – 1857), to a population whose residences and businesses are well-distributed throughout the Town. As shown in **Figure 1B** (Regional Context Map), Ashburnham is bordered by the Towns of Ashby to the east and Winchendon to the west. Its southern edge borders the Town of Westminster and the Cities of Fitchburg and Gardner, while its northern edge borders the New Hampshire Towns of Rindge and New Ipswich. Ashburnham's town boundary encompasses 41 square miles (~26,240 acres) of land and water, making it, geographically, one of the largest towns in central Massachusetts.

The Town's high elevation is exemplified by Mount Watatic, the second highest elevation in Worcester County and is one component of an archipelago of summits classified as the Wapack Range, which ascends out of the Worcester/Southern Monadnock Plateau. The combination of its geologic history and human influence has created the high number of reservoirs, lakes, and wetlands that characterize the Town and help to make it the scenic community it is today.

The headwaters of three separate watersheds, the Millers, Nashua, and Souhegan occur within the Town's boundaries. Because of this, human use of water and land within Ashburnham has had and continues to have a great influence on the quality of water outside of its borders. Many water features of Ashburnham are shared across borders with other towns, such as Little Watatic Pond (shared with Ashby), Sunset Lake (shared with Winchendon), and Lake Wampanoag (shared with Gardner).

The only lake in Ashburnham protected as a Class A drinking water resource, Upper Naukeag Lake, serves as the water supply for portions of Ashburnham and Winchendon. In 2020, Ashburnham used an average of 295,000 gallons each day (gpd), while Winchendon used 720,000 gpd.² Residents outside of the water supply district rely on private wells for their water needs.

¹ Swain, P. C. 2020. *Classification of the Natural Communities of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Westborough, MA. (https://www.mass.gov/doc/classification-of-the-natural-communities-of-massachusetts/download?_ga=2.121164744.1737597045.1640372501-10741693.1636919209)

² Personal Communication with Adam Testagrossa. November 30, 2021. Water Treatment Plant Manager. Veolia Water North America Northeast LLC. Ashburnham, MA.

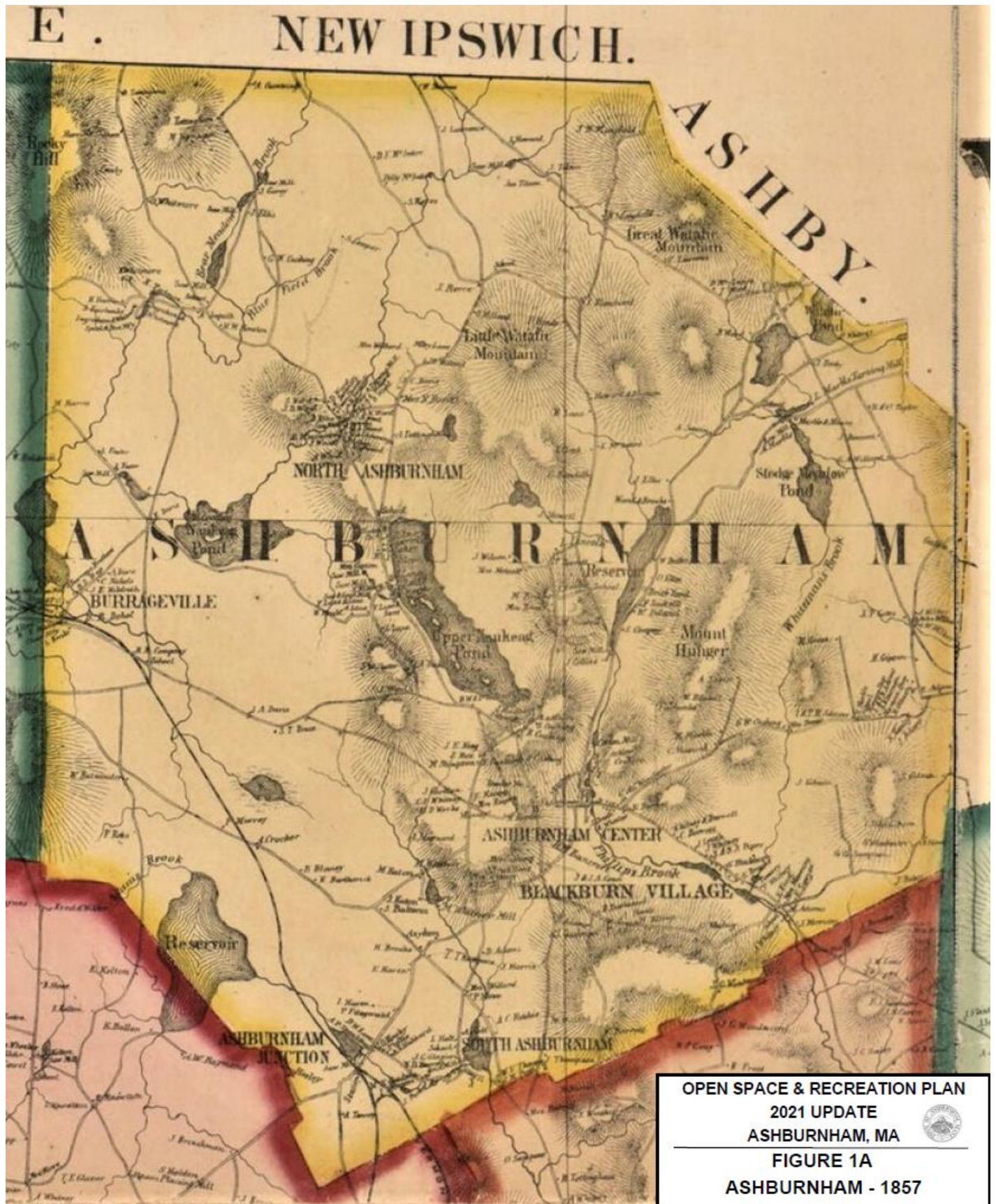


FIGURE 1A. ASHBURNHAM (1857)

Regional Context Map

Ashburnham is abutted by five Massachusetts towns and two New Hampshire towns. The town shares three watersheds with its neighbors, along with a number of water features, such as Little Vernal Pond (Ashby), Sunset Lake (Winchendon), and Lake Wampanoag (Gardner). The town also shares its main water source, Upper Naukeag Lake, with Winchendon. The ongoing Rail Trail project would connect Ashburnham's downtown with Gardner and Winchendon. Major routes of connection from Ashburnham to surrounding communities are Routes 101 and 119. There are no extant railroads connecting Ashburnham to the surrounding community.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN
2021 UPDATE
ASHBURNHAM, MA
FIGURE 1B

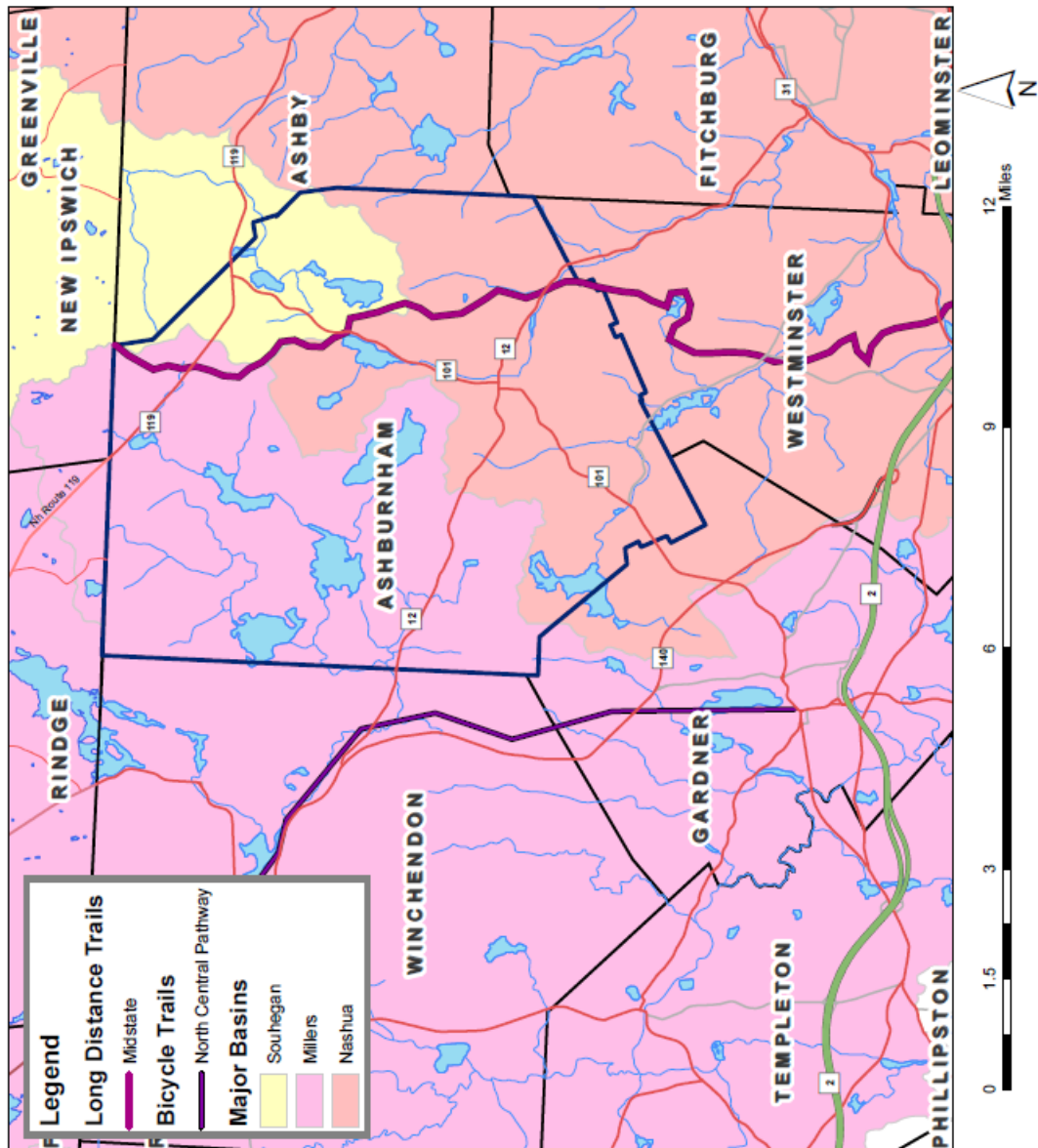


FIGURE 1B. REGIONAL CONTEXT MAP

While the current water supply is sufficient to meet the demands of residents, the possibility exists for this resource to become over-taxed if the population increases significantly. Individual facilities also have DEP-regulated Non-Community Groundwater Wells, including Camp Winnekeag, Camp Split Rock, Camp Wellville, Camp Collier, and the former Ashburnham Country Store on Route 119. Local groups working to protect these critical watersheds from overuse and pollution are the Millers River Watershed Council, the Nashua River Watershed Association, and the Souhegan Watershed Association. Regionally, these groups help maintain water quality and watershed health. Efforts by the City of Fitchburg to protect its water supply also have recently conserved lands within its public water supply watershed.

Economically, Ashburnham and its surrounding towns are subject to growing residential development pressures. A higher rate of residential growth is occurring compared to commercial or industrial growth, which is either waning or nonexistent. Ashburnham's 2,700 acres of open water draw vacationers and part-time residents from all parts of New England and beyond. Year-round and seasonal residents are proud of the Town's scenic and rugged rural character, its aesthetic beauty, and reputation as a vacation destination. However, with regard to water quality, some concern does exist about maintaining its natural heritage into the future.

This concern for water quality is especially true with regard to waterfront homes and cottages and the presence and increased demands on old, aging, and/or poorly maintained on-site septic systems, many of which are not compliant with today's standards. Some of these old, deteriorating, sub-standard systems are beginning to fail, a trend which is anticipated to continue. On the contrary, either as part of redevelopment or repairs, many failed or failing systems have been replaced with more modern, Title-5 compliant systems, an improvement. Through careful, coordinated planning, and the enforcement of best management practices and existing bylaws, the situation can be monitored and even improved. However, as development densities increase, and as more seasonal homes are converted to year-round usage it will be critically important to continue to monitor and enforce those management practices and bylaws to ensure long-term water quality and natural heritage goals are achieved.

Like its neighbors in Gardner, Templeton and Westminster, Ashburnham also has completed the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) planning grant process and, in September 2021, was designated an MVP community. This designation serves as a prerequisite to and, thus, facilitates the Town's future applications for MVP action grants relative to climate change resilience.

B. History of Ashburnham

Ashburnham is in an area that was traditionally used by both the Nipmuc and Pennecook-Abenaki people. The north-central Massachusetts region has been described as the meeting place of the Nipmuc and the Abenaki. Their former presence on the land is known by the names of Ashburnham's rivers, streams, lakes, and mountains and in the ceremonial rock formations they left behind. In Kinnicutt's 1905 preamble to "Indian Names and Places in Worcester County Massachusetts", it is stated that "*Your rivers guard our ancient names*" and "*Your mountains are*

our monuments”.³ This could not be truer than it is in Ashburnham; Today, native place names live on in many of the Town’s landscape features:

- **Watatic** – Nipmuc. According to Kinnicutt⁴ (1905, page 53), “This name, probably, is a corruption of *Wetu-tick*, ‘wigwam brook’... The name probably first applied to the large stream near the mountain, and afterward applied to the mountain and pond.” According to a current Ashburnham resident who is Nipmuc, the mountain is shaped like a *Wetu* (twig and bark dome house), and it was believed that *Wetuomanit* (the Female Entity/goddess) dwelt on the summit.
- **Naukeag** – Nipmuc for “soft land” or perhaps “sand place.” According to Kinnicutt (1905, pages 29-33), the term was used for the land in and around modern-day Ashburnham. An early History of Worcester County reported that “On the banks of Little Naukeag is a white sand equal in fineness and whiteness to that on the banks of Cape Ann.”⁶
- **Winnekeag** – Nipmuc for “good fishing place”⁵
- **Pequoig** – Native place name of the Millers River and the area of Winchendon that borders Ashburnham. This name originally must have applied to the land about the river, and it is undoubtedly derived from *Pauqu’ unauke*, signifying ‘cultivated land’ or ‘cleared land’. This name is found frequently with slightly varying form. It is also applied to the land around the same river downstream in Athol (Kinnicutt, 1905, page 37).⁶ One of the earliest references to this name is by Mary Rowlandson, the minister’s wife captured in the raid of Lancaster at the beginning of the King Philips war in 1676. In her autobiographical narrative of her captivity and removal she states that the native people who took her captive referred to the river as ‘Baquag’ (Pequoig).
- **Souhegan** – River rising in the ponds of eastern Ashburnham, flows through the N. W. part of Ashby into New Hampshire. In Livermore and Putnam’s “History of Wilton” the meaning is given as “‘River of the Plains’, derived from the Indian name ‘*Susheki*, signifying a plain (Kinnicutt, 1905, page 45).⁶
- **Nookagee, or Nockege** – Name of a small stream, now Phillips brook, rising in Ashburnham and flowing into the “North Branch” Nashua River at West Fitchburg. This name, however, is supposed to have been the original name of the North Branch. *Noekege* Mills at Fitchburg. In early records “*Naukeag*” was the name for the land about or near Ashburnham, and probably from this land name the water name was taken (Kinnicutt, 1905, page 32-33).⁶

Early Ashburnham was shaped first by Native people using natural lakes and developing key footpaths. A documented Native American ceremonial site in Ashburnham was described by Gage in 2013.⁶ As noted therein:

³ Kinnicutt, Lincoln N. (1905). Indian Names of Places in Worcester County Massachusetts with Interpretations of Some of Them (PDF). (http://www.nipmuclanguage.org/uploads/5/0/7/7/50775337/indian_names_worc..pdf)

⁴ Kinnicutt, Lincoln N. (1905). [Indian Names of Places in Worcester County Massachusetts with Interpretations of Some of Them](http://www.nipmuclanguage.org/uploads/5/0/7/7/50775337/indian_names_worc..pdf) (PDF). Worcester, Massachusetts. p. 53.

⁵ Nipmuc Place Names of New England. <https://www.nativetech.org/Nipmuc/placenames/mainmass.html>

⁶ Gage, M. 2013. Native American Ceremonial Site, Ashburnham Massachusetts. (Unpublished.)

“This site has four enclosures, a Manitou stone with an associated split wedge cairn, at least one cairn group, and several other stone structures. These structures are found in three distinct clusters and can technically be treated as three separate sites. However, the three groups appear to be interrelated and are therefore treated as a single site. The site is located on the upper slopes of the east side of a hill in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. The eastern slope forms a north-south ridge on the west side of a deep valley through which a brook runs.”

“The Central Massachusetts region was occupied primarily by the subgroup of Southern New England Algonquins known as the Nipmuck” (MA Historical Commission; February 1985).⁷ Before colonial settlement, native Nipmucks, and Squakheags from Northfield/Royalston area likely used seasonal sites near natural lakes like Cheshire and Lincoln Ponds. The *MA Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Ashburnham* (MHC, 1984)⁸ identifies likely pre-1620 Native American trade routes within “the highland Naukeag Lake area southwest of Wapack Range on upper Whitman River and Millers River tributaries”, as well as an “east/west trail south of Naukeag Lakes (conjectured as Russell Hill Road) with a connector to Central Street southwest to Crystal Lake” in Gardner. Other native footpaths also are referenced that still are used today as town roads. In 1958, historian and archeologist Chester Price wrote an article which was published in the *New Hampshire Archeologist*, titled “Historic Indian Trails of New Hampshire”. (The article was later revised to include a map in 1967.) The beginning of one of those trails the ‘Souhegan Trail’ was located within Ashburnham and followed the course of the Souhegan River, from its source near Mount Watatic, north to Merrimack, New Hampshire where it meets the Merrimac River.⁹

The documented presence of Native trails in this location makes sense; Ashburnham would have been an important “transportation junction” for native people considering that waterways were the most efficient means of travel and preferred routes of Native people. Ashburnham was situated at the headwaters of three of the region’s rivers, all navigable by canoe, the Nashua, Souhegan, and Pequig (Millers). These rivers lead to two of the most important Native fishing and meeting places in the region – Great Falls (Peskeomskut) on the Connecticut River and Pawtucket Falls, home of the great Bashaba (Sachem of all Sachems), Passaconaway, on the Merrimack River. Both places are known, in name and lore, for their abundance of salmon and as a peaceful gathering place of many different tribes and bands of Native people.

Per the above-referenced MHC Reconnaissance Survey, as well as Stearns (1887)¹⁰, Ashburnham’s first colonial settlement probably occurred around 1734, potentially in conjunction with the MA General Court’s land grants in the same year and construction of the Northfield Road, which was built to facilitate the travel of several prominent citizens of Lunenburg to large tracts of land granted to them in southwestern New Hampshire, above Northfield. Settlement in the area

⁷ MA Historical Commission. February 1985. *Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts*. Office of the MA Secretary of State. Boston, MA.

⁸ MA Historical Commission. 1984. *MA Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Ashburnham*. Office of the MA Secretary of State. Boston, MA.

⁹ Price, Chester B. 1967. “Historic Indian Trails of New Hampshire.” *The New Hampshire Archeologist*, 14: 1-33

¹⁰ Stearns, Ezra S. 1887. *History of Ashburnham Massachusetts from The Grant of Dorchester Canada to The Present Time, 1734-1886*. Published by the Town of Ashburnham. Ashburnham, MA.

occurred due to the plentiful natural resources including timber and rivers for hydro-powered mills. Native hostilities led to the abandonment of the settlement in 1744. Resettlement was slowed by frontier warfare, but by 1757, there were enough people in residence to establish permanent colonization.

In 1735-1736, each Dorchester (MA) company of sixty soldiers and the heirs of those deceased who served in an expedition to Canada in 1690 were granted a township by the MA General Court, later determined by the Court to consist of an area six miles square. As described by Stearns,

“...these grants were styled Canada townships and they generally received the additional name of the town in which a majority of the petitioners resided. To the soldiers from Dorchester were assigned this town [Ashburnham] which bore the name Dorchester Canada many years.”

Prior to this grant, towns and individuals had received land within the town's bounds for service to the province. These grants include the 400-acre Starr Grant awarded in 1658; the Cambridge Grant and Lexington Grant of 1,000 acres each awarded in 1734; the 450-acre Bluefield Grant in 1734; the 400-acre Converse Grant in 1735; and the 600-acre Rolfe Grant, also in 1735. After these distributions, all remaining parcels were auctioned off in 1781. Ashburnham, named for the second Earl of Ashburnham in England, was finally incorporated in 1765. In 1767, part of its territory was included in Ashby. Another section was joined with Gardner in 1792. Ashby annexed additional territory from Ashburnham in 1792. Portions of Gardner (1815) and Westminster (1824) were also annexed to Ashburnham.

Like most New England towns, when Ashburnham was settled it was cleared of forests and farmed. Settlement was dispersed and small-scale farming and potash manufacturing helped support the early residents. Since agriculture provided a small return due to poor soil conditions, a harsh environment, and rugged topography, mill and manufacturing industries utilizing the abundant waterpower opportunities soon arose. Colonial settlement began to outline the eventual boundaries of the town, to create main roads, and to develop the agricultural character that still defines the town. Milling industries helped to develop the town, and later the chair industry expanded the town further. The beginnings of Lake Watatic commenced about this time, with the construction of an 8-foot dam in 1772 by the ancestors of Granville Rideout (1913-2005), a prominent local resident.¹¹ The purpose of the dam was to make a storage pond to supply water to power several mills in the area. The dam was heightened to 20 feet in the early 1900s by a new owner. During the hurricane of 1938, a large section of the dam was breached when the Wallace Pond Dam upstream was destroyed due to the storm. Subsequently, by the early 1950s, Granville Rideout owned the dam and proposed its reconstruction to restore the former lake community, using the profits from his Naukeag Hotel (formerly the McLean Ambulatory Center) on Lake Street. Dam reconstruction was completed in 1955.

By 1775, enough mills were in town to create a vibrant milling industry. Small villages began to grow around industrial areas located in the center on Phillips Brook, downstream and to the east in Blackburn Village, in Lane Village on the west side of Upper Naukeag Lake, and in North and South Ashburnham. The first church was created, and the minister ordained in 1760, and the first

¹¹ Watatic Lake Association. 2010. *Lake Watatic/Lake History*. WLA. Ashburnham, MA.

schoolhouses were built in the 1770s. By the 1820s, residential development also occurred along Main Street between Ashby Road and Cushing Street and to the south of the center. In 1817, the road now known as Route 12 was built and continued to concentrate growth and industry around Phillips Brook.

In 1799, the “town of Ashburnham became mildly excited over the project of the Fifth Massachusetts [Turnpike], as it hoped thereby to be relieved from the impending cost of a new county road.”¹² After negotiations with the corporation, an agreement was reached, by which the town contributed \$1000, but the corporation reserved the right to build its road where it saw fit. Ultimately, no part of the road was ever built in Ashburnham. The 5th Massachusetts Turnpike, as constructed, extended from Leominster to Greenfield with a branch to Northfield, segments of which ultimately became Route 2. Many sections of the original 5th Massachusetts Turnpike remain in Fitchburg, north of existing Route 2, as well as in Erving.

By 1830, thirty-two mills were in operation, many in the chair industry. Phillips Brook powered eight mills including a pail factory, trip hammer carding, fulling (a step in woolen cloth making which involves the cleansing of cloth, particularly wool, to eliminate oils, dirt, and other impurities, and to make it thicker), lathe, a cotton, and saw/grist mills. Adams Brook in South Ashburnham generated two saw/grist mills and three lathe mills. With the relocation of the Meeting House in 1831, civic activities moved from Meetinghouse Hill to Main Street in the Town Center. The Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad arrived in 1847 and looped through the southwestern corner of Town, increasing immigration to the Town by Irish and French-Canadian settlers as well as numbers of English, Scots, Germans, and Finns. A Celtic cross, a replica of one that stands on the island of Iona, just off the coast of Scotland, is located in the Meeting House Cemetery to honor the diverse immigrants in Ashburnham.



Amos Pollard

As an aside, one must not overlook the services of Dr. Amos Pollard during this same period (see photograph at left and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos Pollard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_Pollard)). Dr. Pollard was a medical doctor born in Ashburnham on 29 October 1803. In 1834, he travelled to Texas where he was the chief surgeon in charge of the hospital at the Alamo. During the siege by Antonio López de Santa Anna's Mexican army, he died there on 6 March 1836.

By 1840, “Ashburnham would become synonymous with the chair industry.”¹³ Due to the minimal initial outlay in capital and equipment necessary, it was an ideal industry for the Town. The Winchester Chair Company, located off the Town Center, became the major industrial facility in Town. A small cluster of woodenware manufacturers were established in North Ashburnham where the Union Church was built in 1842.

¹² Woods, Frederic J. 1919. *The Turnpikes of New England*. Marshall Jones Company. Boston, MA.

¹³ Stearns, Ezra S. 1887. *History of Ashburnham Massachusetts from The Grant of Dorchester Canada to The Present Time, 1734-1886*. Published by the Town of Ashburnham. Ashburnham, MA.

Secondary industrial development occurred in South Ashburnham with a number of small chair factories along Adams Brook. Other industrial establishments, including a tannery, woodworking mills, and a cotton factory (1849) emerged north along Phillips Brook. After 1850, farming in Ashburnham became specialized, focusing on milk, cheese, hay, and horses and poultry. Residential development grew along Westminster Street and south on Williams Road. To the west, Ashburnham Depot was established with the arrival of the railroad. By 1865, the chair manufacturing and textile industries dominated the economic base of the Town. Cushing Academy, a private preparatory school, was founded in 1865 at the bequest of Thomas Parkman Cushing's 1850 will. It remains the major institutional development in Ashburnham.

Industrial activity peaked in the 1880s when the Winchester Chair Company complex became the Boston Chair Company, grew to thirty buildings, and became one of the largest chair factories in New England (and Ashburnham's largest business). The firm declined rapidly after this point due to numerous fires and bankruptcies and was auctioned off in 1894. Smaller enterprises occupied portions of the property, but nothing replaced the stature of the Boston Chair Company. The population of the Town fluctuated greatly during this time due to lack of steady employment. In 1930, the W. F. Whitney Company, also a chair manufacturer, was the largest employer in the area with 200 employees. When industry began to decline in the early 1900s, the Town moved towards being a recreational, summer/second home area.

As for municipal services, the original Center Village water system was built prior to 1871 by George Winchester and had at least 10 hydrants for extinguishing fires. This water system consisted of a small dam and reservoir located between High and Cushing Streets, which fed the hydrants via 4-inch pipe. Between 1871 and 1885, Mr. Winchester's water system was purchased by Ivers Whitney Adams, who also leased the Naukeag Reservoir from the Town in 1874 for the propagation of fish and formed the Naukeag Water Company. The Town purchased the Naukeag Water Company in 1897.¹⁴

Still, while a public water supply served the Center Village, the South Village (i.e., South Ashburnham) was without a municipal water supply system, and the cost to extend the system from the Naukeag Reservoir (i.e., Upper Naukeag Lake) to the South Village was prohibitive. Then, at a special town meeting in January 1912, Ivers Whitney Adams offered to pay for the system's extension, which was completed by Columbus Day 1912. In gratitude, the South Village residents installed a water trough at the corner of South Main and Center Streets, along with a plaque stating, "*Erected by the People of South Ashburnham in appreciation of the generosity of Ivers W. Adams, October 12, 1912*".¹⁵

Ashburnham's scenic natural and historical resources are an integral part of the town's economy, character, and culture.

¹⁴ Gagnon, Christopher. *Historic Water Trough Moved to Winchester Park*. Ashburnham, MA.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Gagnon.

Adams also gave the Town the “Schoolboy of 1850” statue in 1913 as a monument to “one of a generation of New England boys whose valor in war was equaled only by their achievements in peace.”



Schoolboy of 1850

This statue, prominently located on the corner of School Street and Main Street, exemplifies the spirit of Ashburnham as expressed in Adams own words in his dedication speech, “His face is turned to the future, in his heart is the tuneful song of hope and in his balanced pose and resolute face is revealed the promise of achievement of life.”

Another notable statue ‘looks over’ Main Street from Town Hall (see photograph, at right). This monument is dedicated to the men of Ashburnham who fought in the Civil War. Melvin Ohio Adams erected the monument using \$5,000 he received from the sale of his Winchester estate to the Town of Ashburnham for a new town hall. The monument was installed near the new town hall, the Jacob H. Fairbanks Memorial Hall, and the two were dedicated on the same day in the year 1904.



Civil War Monument

Agricultural landscapes with eighteenth and early nineteenth century dwellings still exist in Ashburnham, most notably on Russell Hill Road and Wilker Road. In commemoration of this area’s significance, the 322-acre Cambridge Grant Historic District located along these roadways was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

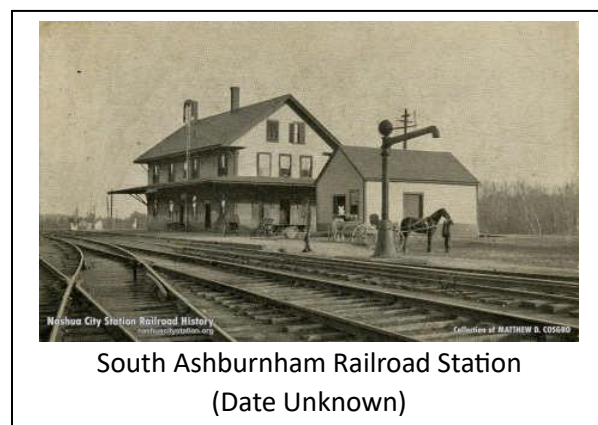
In the early twentieth century, the Cambridge Grant became an active summer arts community. Home to writers and artists, it was noted for popular outdoor theatrical performances sponsored by the successful stage actor, Aldrich Bowker (1875–1947), one of its summer residents. Bowker succeeded Henry Travers in the role of Grandpa in George S. Kaufman's *You Can't Take It with You* on Broadway and played it for over 500 consecutive performances in New York and Chicago. When Kaufman won the *Pulitzer Prize* for the play in 1937, Bowker was the presenter. He went on to play character roles in 25 motion pictures between 1939 and 1942, including *The Major and the Minor* and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Aldrich Bowker's brother, Frank Bowker, also a district resident, was the author of *Ashby Four Corners*, a play about life in a small New England town whose setting is Russell Hill. Clara Burbank (1862–1927), a successful still life artist, was a

neighbor in the district, as was Amy L. Burbank (1875–1948), a popular New England landscape painter.¹⁶

Other significant rural housing clusters survive at Lane Village, west of Upper Naukeag Lake and on Tuckerman Road in the northwest. Ashburnham's Center retains many of its nineteenth-century structures, including a partial chair factory complex with worker housing and a variety of modest residential, commercial, and civic structures. Early-nineteenth-century worker housing survives along Fitchburg Road at Blackburn Village, as well as the Foss and Lester White's houses in Factory Village. Other examples of worker housing in the Center are on Puffer and Central Streets. In South Ashburnham, concentrations of nineteenth-century worker housing exist, but little remains of the industrial complexes.

Today Ashburnham boasts several architectural gems, such as the Historical Society Building (1835), the Community Church (1836), Stevens Memorial Library (1890), the Fairbanks Memorial Town Hall (1904), and the Dolly Whitney Adams School (1905). The Historical Society Building was originally the Town's second Meeting House and was moved to its current position on Main Street from Meetinghouse Hill in 1838. In 1776, many men and boys were members of the "Minutemen". Among these brave Americans was Ebenezer Munroe, a resident of Ashburnham, who is said to have fired "the shot heard round the world". The Munroe musket was carried on horseback to Lexington and Concord as part of our National Bicentennial and is now housed in the Ashburnham Historical Society. Stevens Library now houses a nationally renowned, privately owned museum, The Historic Piano Study Center and Frederick Collection of Grand Pianos. Fairbanks Memorial Town Hall, located in the center of town, continues to serve its function of housing town offices. The Dolly Whitney Adams School houses the Town Library: it was donated to the Town by Melvin O. Adams, one of Lizzie Borden's successful defense lawyers of 1893.

The extension of the Fitchburg Railroad into South Ashburnham and its juncture with the Cheshire Railroad in the mid-1800s also was integral to the Town's historic fabric. The South Ashburnham station is pictured below.¹⁷



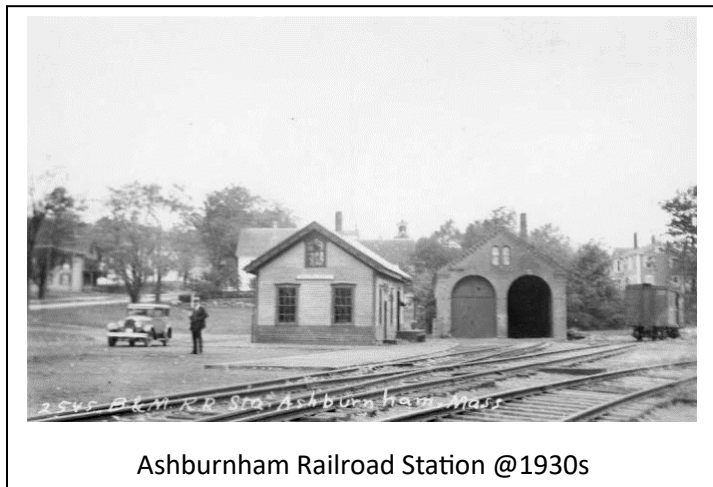
Opened in 1848, the Cheshire Railroad provided direct route northwest through Winchendon (MA) and Keene (NH) to Bellows Falls (VT), while other railways extending from South Ashburnham (e.g., the Vermont & Massachusetts Railroad) provided service to Brattleboro (VT), and Greenfield westward to North Adams (MA), with continuing connections to the Hudson River and beyond. In the 1920s, the Minute Man to Chicago, the *Green Mountain Flyer* and the Mount Royal to Montreal, and the *Berkshire Flyer* to Troy (NY) all passed through South Ashburnham.

¹⁶ Allan F. Small. *National Register of Historic Places: Nomination of Cambridge Grant Historic District, 2001* and Wikipedia, 2017.

¹⁷ Nashua City Station Railroad History. See <http://www.nashuacitystation.org/station/southashburnham-ashburnham-ma/>

Most notable along the South Ashburnham route, which continues to provide freight service, is the steep ‘Ashburnham Hill’ between Fitchburg and East Gardner. Over this distance of nearly 10 miles, the elevation rises approximately 550-feet, a grade of approximately 55 feet per mile, resulting in the need for railroad engineers and builders to design and construct the ‘Ashburnham Curve’, a horseshoe shaped curve in South Ashburnham that in 1876 replaced the initial switchback to better facilitate and expedite train travel to the north and west.

Although existing for only a short period, the transportation history of Ashburnham would not be complete without reference to the ‘Ashburnham Branch’, a single rail track that extended 2.59 miles from South Ashburnham to the Town Center. The ‘downtown’ Ashburnham Station, pictured below, presently is occupied by the Department of Public Works.¹⁸



Ashburnham Railroad Station @1930s

The Ashburnham Branch, owned and operated by the Ashburnham Railroad Company, commenced service in 1874, eventually becoming a part of the Fitchburg railroad and, subsequently, the Boston & Maine Railroad. Due to decreasing revenues, passenger service on the Ashburnham Branch ceased in 1924; freight service ended in 1930. In March 1936, floodwaters washed away the bridge and large portions of the rail-bed south of Central Street between Williams and Old County Roads.¹⁹

Today, the rail-bed remains a prominent feature. The eastern portion of which has been converted to a rail trail and future use of the remainder of the rail bed as a rail trail continues to be explored.

Notwithstanding its past industrial, manufacturing and transportation prominence, Ashburnham over the decades has transitioned into a predominantly residential community and source of recreational opportunities. Commercial retail businesses are limited and primarily confined to the Village Center-Commercial District. Regardless, the diverse expanses of open space and the irresistible challenge to reach the summit of Mount Watatic promise to attract future visitors. In 2015, the Town of Ashburnham celebrated its 250th anniversary. Since its incorporation in 1765, the Town’s demonstrated ability to adapt in response to changing cultural, institutional, economic, transportation and environmental conditions is a proud testament to its past and present citizenry.

This ability to adapt in response to changing conditions has served the community well in recent years as it weathered the “Great Recession” of 2007-2009, the ice storm of 2008, recent increased

¹⁸ Images for Ashburnham Railroad Station. See <https://www.google.com/#q=ashburnham+railroad+station&start=10>

¹⁹ Dana D. Goodwin, Ashburnham Hill & The Ashburnham Branch. In B&M Bulletin, Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society, Fall 1976.

intensity winter storms, the recent and ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and many other environmental, economic, and societal challenges faced by the community.

C. Population Characteristics

Population Trends

In the last decade (2010-2020), Ashburnham's population increased by 3.85%. Overall, the population is gradually aging.²⁰ Over the last *twenty* years (2000 – 2020), Ashburnham experienced a 13.9% population growth, approximately 6% greater than the state as a whole during that same period of time. While Ashburnham's population growth exceeded that of all its neighboring Town's and the statewide growth in the period between 2000 – 2010, population growth has otherwise been lower than the statewide rate and that of many of its abutting Towns from 1990 to 2000 and from 2010 to 2020. According to the US Census, 6,315 people resided in Ashburnham in 2020, a 13.9% percent increase from the 2000 Census population of 5,546. This high growth rate is consistent with neighboring towns like Ashby and Westminster and demonstrated faster growth than the state average of 8% during this time. For a longer-term comparison, over the last *thirty* years (1990 – 2020), Ashburnham's population increased by 16.2%, only 2% more than the statewide population growth during that time-period and lower than most of its abutting Towns including Ashby, Westminster, and Winchendon (see Table A).

Table A: Regional and Statewide Population Sizes from 2000-2020²¹

Municipality	2000	10-Year Change (%)	2010	10-Year Change (%)	2020	10-Year Change (%)	30-Year % Change (1990-2020)
Ashburnham	5,546	+2.1%	6,081	+9.6%	6,315	+3.8%	+16.2%
Ashby	2,845	+4.7%	3,074	+8.0%	3,193	+3.9%	+17.5%
Fitchburg	39,102	-5.1%	40,318	+3.1%	41,946	+4.0%	+1.8%
Gardner	20,770	+3.2%	20,228	-2.6%	21,287	+5.2%	+5.8%
Westminster	6,907	+14.6%	7,227	+4.6%	8,213	+13.6%	+33.0%
Winchendon	9,611	+9.2%	10,300	+7.2%	10,364	+0.6%	+17.7%
Massachusetts	6,349,097	+5.5%	6,547,629	+3.1%	6,855,546	+4.7%	+13.9%

With a land area of 41± square miles, the 2020 population density is 154 people/sq. mi., up from 148 people/sq. mi. in 2010. While at varying rates, Ashburnham's population and population density are increasing over time.

²⁰ United States Census Bureau. July 2021. *QuickFacts: Ashburnham town, Worcester County, Massachusetts*. See <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ashburnhamtownworcestercountymassachusetts/PST040219>

²¹ United States Census Bureau. U.S. Decennial Census: Census 1990, Census 2000, Census, 2010, Census 2020. See <https://www.census.gov/data.html>

Family Income

Per the American Community Survey 2016 to 2020 Estimates, residents of Ashburnham earned an estimated \$43,423 per capita in 2020. Estimated median household income in 2020 was \$113,558. In 2022, the average value of a single-family home in Ashburnham was \$292,769, a 43% increase since 2012. The tax rate for Fiscal Year 2022 was \$18.88 per \$1,000 valuation, down from \$20.55 in 2021 and \$20.10 in 2020.²² In 2020, Ashburnham spent approximately \$13,204 per student and \$14,920 in 2021.²³

Employers and Employment Trends

The largest employers in Ashburnham are Cushing Academy, the Regional School District, and the Town, itself. Most of the employed find work outside of the town or in home businesses. As documented by the MA Department of Unemployment Assistance/Labor Market Information, the number of residents employed in February of 2023 was 3,575 and the unemployment rate at this same time was 3.8%, compared to 3.8% in Ashby, 6.5% in Fitchburg, 5.5% in Gardner, and 4.2% in Winchendon. Within the North Central Workforce Development Area, the February 2023 unemployment rate was 4.7%.²⁴ Of those employed, the average one-way commuting time to work for an Ashburnham resident was 37.1 minutes.

D. Growth and Development Patterns

Growth and development in Ashburnham is characteristic of Massachusetts and the New England region. In the 1800s, Ashburnham grew, as other towns did, with hydro-powered mills and a thriving manufacturing industry. Moving into the 1900s, industry waned, and Ashburnham began to resemble the peaceful, quiet, rural town that it is today. The lakes, many of which are human-made impoundments, now have shorelines populated with year-round and vacation homes. Employment for residents is largely limited to municipal government and the regional school district. Ashburnham saw a large boom in population during the 1980s, when the population increased by 30-percent and another significant period of growth close to 10% between 2000 and 2010. Over the full course of the past 30 years, between 1990 and 2020, the population has increased, on average, by approximately two percent per year. In terms of development, most of the Town is zoned residential (see **Figure 2 – Zoning Map**). The Town recently established a Bylaw Review committee to explore how existing land use protection bylaws may be improved or more effectively implemented and enforced to encourage sustainable development practices and promote and incentivize the use and application of smart growth strategies such as Open Space Residential Developments over standard subdivision development or “Approval-Not-Required” (ANR) development practices.

²² Town of Ashburnham Website – Department of the Assessors. April 2022. See [https://www.ashburnham-ma.gov/assessors/pages/ashburnham-assessment-tax-brochures \(2011 and 2022 brochures\)](https://www.ashburnham-ma.gov/assessors/pages/ashburnham-assessment-tax-brochures%2011%20and%2022%20brochures)

²³ Mass Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. April 2022. See <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/ppx.aspx>

²⁴ <https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/LaborForceAndUnemployment/LURAreaResults?AT=15&A=000004&Dopt=TEXT>

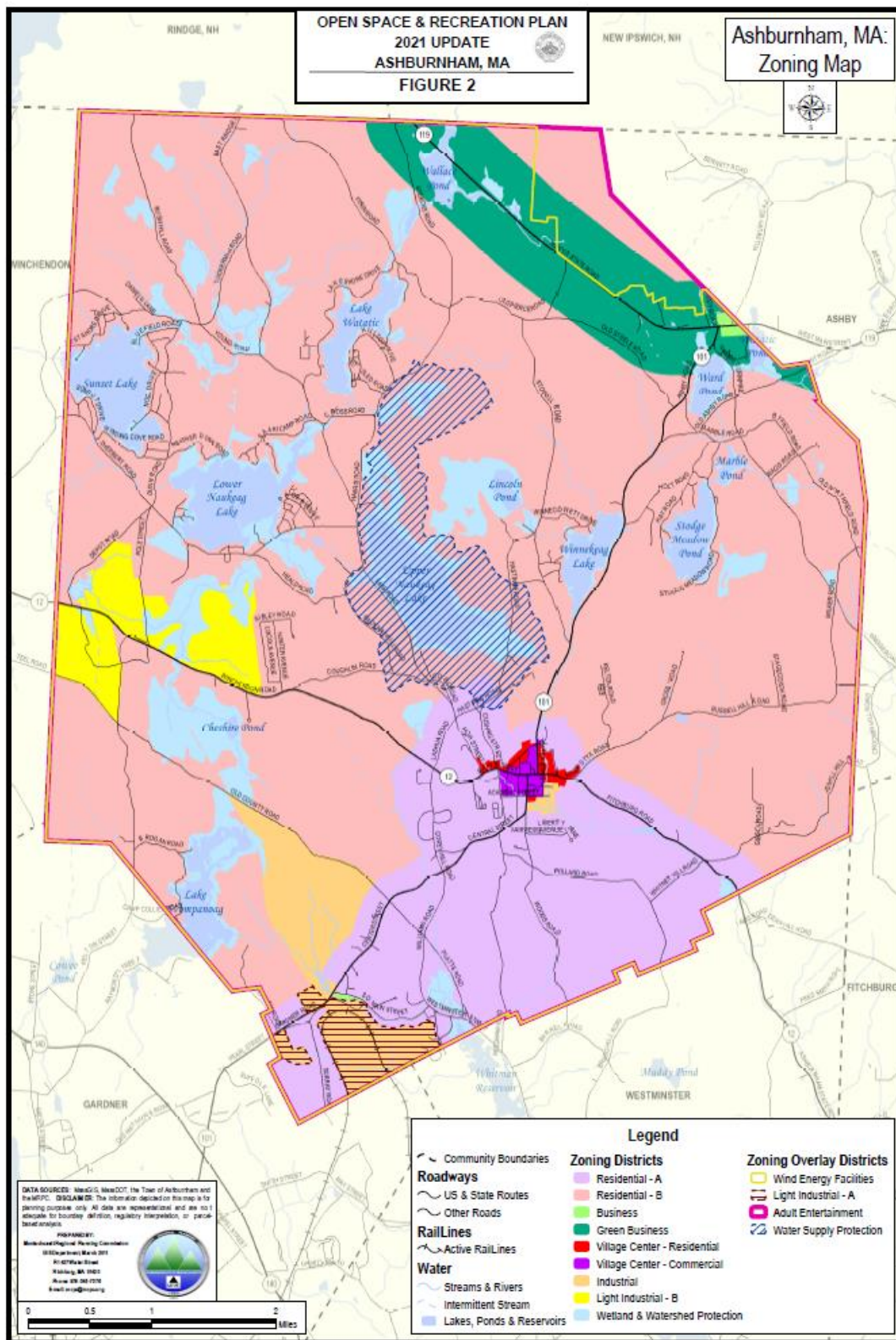


FIGURE 2. TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM ZONING MAP

Patterns and Trends

Ashburnham began as a subsistence farming community with dispersed settlement patterns. Throughout the 1800s, it rose to prominence as an industrial manufacturing town, powered by rivers and timber. Villages grew around hydro-powered mills and the town's population rose quickly in response to the growing industry. When industry declined at the end of the 1800s, so did the population. Although most of the industry is gone today, settlement patterns remain the same with most residential clusters located around lakes and the old mill villages. The decline of industry marked the shift in population trends in Ashburnham's history. When the old labor force left town or found different work, others began to be drawn to Ashburnham for its scenic beauty.

Lake Watatic's creation began in the late 1770s and was designed to provide storage water for area mills. Sunset Lake, Lower Naukeag, Little Watatic Pond, and Stodge Meadow Pond were dammed to create hydropower for industry and have become privately controlled resort lakes with small parcels for vacation homes. Now, these "grandfathered lots" are being converted to larger year-round homes. While Ashburnham still has some seasonal or recreational waterfront homes, many, if not most of those homes have been converted to year-round residences. People continue to move to Ashburnham for its quiet beauty, lakes, and lower cost of living. Although many homes and a large number of residents reside on the shores of Ashburnham's lakes, public access for swimming, fishing, and boating is limited and desired by other residents of the community who do not reside in or own waterfront property.

Employment in the area today is limited and the largest employers are Cushing Academy and the Town of Ashburnham, in large part its public-school department, making education an important part of the community's economy and identity. Aside from Flo Chemical, ABCrosby & Company, Inc., and Triumph Play Systems, Inc, industry is limited. Ashburnham is one of many communities statewide subject to increased growth as new residents are attracted to the natural beauty, moderate tax rates, home values, and good school systems. Over the years, many of the single-family homes were constructed under the ANR (Approval Not Required) provisions of the MA Subdivision Control Law. Such development typically is confined to pre-existing disturbed areas. However, depending on the location, it also may greatly influence a Town's character by fragmenting important natural areas like forests and open lands critical to wildlife and water conservation.

Ashburnham's cultural heritage and the history of its economy has relied to a large degree on the open space and natural resources available for manufacturing and subsistence farming. As noted previously, the Midstate Trail draws a multitude of visitors to the Town and plays a major role as a recreational corridor transecting the Town from south to north before joining the Wapack Trail and the Mount Watatic State Reserve (**see Figure 3 – Formal Trail Inventory**). Today, a minor amount of income is still generated through farming, and forestry on state lands and on private lands held as Chapter 61 forestry management areas. Lakes, streams, and forest define the Town's character and serve to draw people, despite the lack of employment and commerce. Consequently, the protection of forests, lakes, and open space areas is as important to the well-being of the town's economy and residential community as it is to the protection of its natural resources, drinking water supply, and ecosystems.

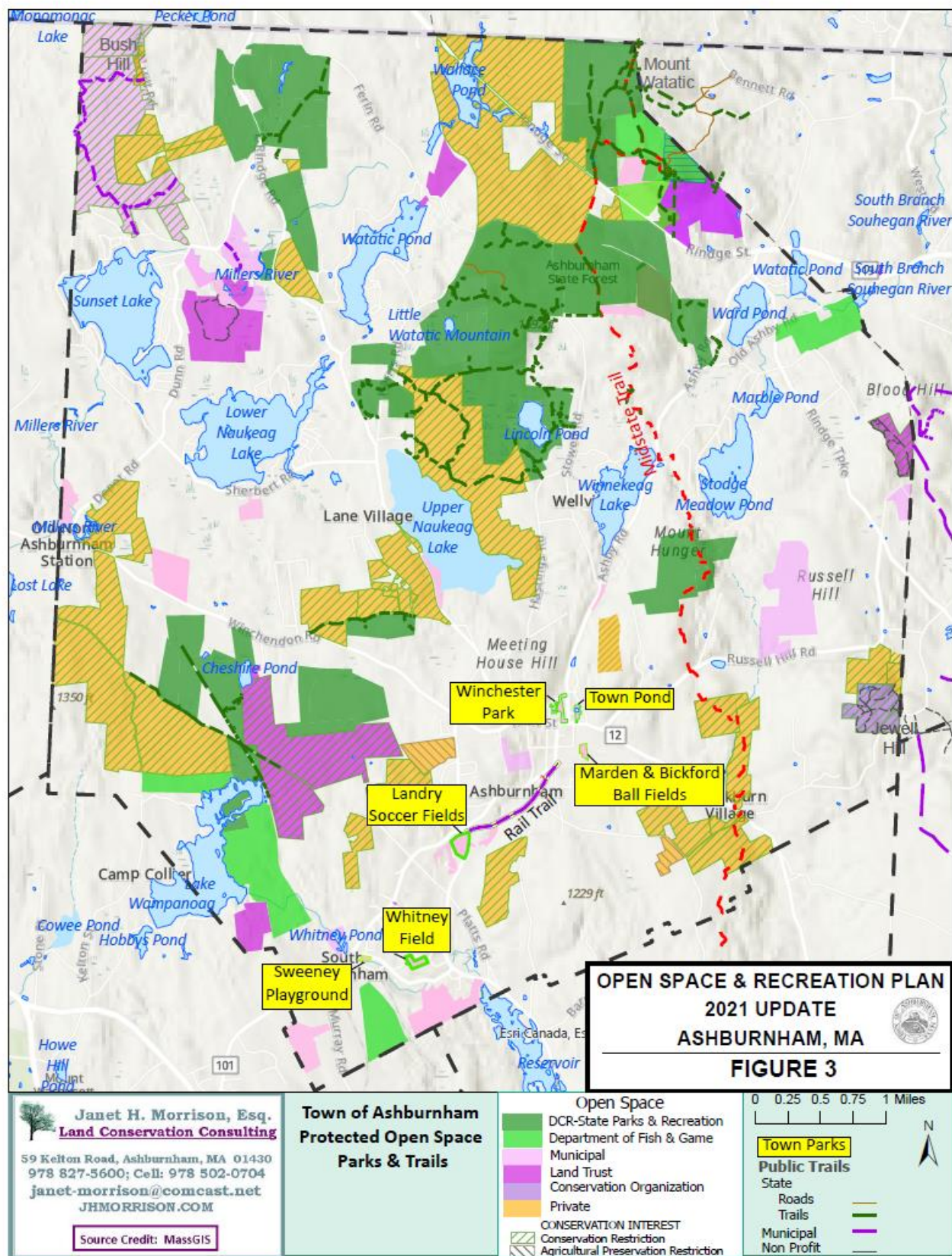


FIGURE 3. FORMAL TRAIL INVENTORY

Infrastructure

Transportation Systems

Most residents of Ashburnham endure a long commute to work outside of town, going even as far as Boston. Transportation is principally achieved by private vehicle-travel, although rail service to the Metro-Boston area is accessible via the Fitchburg line with local stations in Fitchburg and Westminster, both about 8.5 miles away. The average 1-way commute for working residents of Ashburnham is 37 minutes. While increasing public transportation availability and connections may help Ashburnham's residents cope with rising gas prices in the future and meet climate resiliency goals, it is not certain that the Town has a large enough population of potential commuters or if the regions infrastructure and transportation goals and priorities would support such a cause. The state highways that traverse the town include Route 12, which extends east-west through the center; Route 101, a north-south roadway through the town center; and Route 140, to the southwest. Route 2, a four-lane east-west highway, is located just south of Ashburnham. Access to major airlines is at least fifty miles away in Boston, Worcester, Providence, RI, or Manchester, NH.

Local infrastructure improvements, completed in 2021, included the addition of downtown sidewalks from Cushing Street to Lawrence and Pleasant Streets, funded through a MassDOT Complete Streets grant. These sidewalks will facilitate safe pedestrian access to the downtown area and improve pedestrian accommodation, safety, and connectivity by providing access between the downtown commercial district and Cushing Academy.

The Select Board also continues to pursue grants for the extension of the existing rail trail which now extends from Willard Road near downtown to Turnpike Road. In this regard, discussions are ongoing with the MassDOT Highway Division for the addition of a multi-use pathway that would provide an extension of the existing "Rail Trail" from Turnpike Road to the Bresnahan Community Center in South Ashburnham. This pathway, to be funded through the MassDOT State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), is planned as a component of Project #609244 – Ashburnham Roadway Rehabilitation on Route 101. The project is scheduled for Fiscal-Year (FY) 2025. In addition to an extension of the bike path, this project also includes sidewalks from the Bresnahan Community Center to the AllTown community market (gas station, donut shop, and convenience store marketplace). The project has completed the 25% design phase (approved by MassDOT) and is working on final design completion. The \$9.2 million project is endorsed by Congresswoman Lori Trahan and the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) as part of the 2023-2027 DRAFT State Transportation Improvement Program approved by the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in June of 2022.

The Town also recently received \$1.1M for Downtown Economic Development Projects aimed at improving connectivity, livability, and commercial viability of Ashburnham's Downtown, including funding through the MassWorks Infrastructure Program for design, engineering, and construction costs associated with pedestrian sidewalk improvements and roadway rehabilitation along Route 12 from Lawrence/Pleasant Streets to the Phillips Brook Bridge. Notification of the awards were made by the Baker-Polito Administration in October of 2022 with projects anticipated to commence in the Spring or early Summer of 2023.

Water Supply System

Upper Naukeag Lake, a 240-acre spring-fed reservoir in northern Ashburnham, supplies drinking water to both the Winchendon and Ashburnham Water Departments. In Ashburnham, the Board of Water & Sewer Commissioners oversees approximately 53 miles of water lines with 1,200 service connections. Ashburnham used an average of 245,000 gallons each day (gpd) in 2021, while Winchendon used 665,000 gpd in 2020.

Sewage Collection/Disposal System

The public sewer system presently is 25 miles in length and is only available in the center of town and South Ashburnham. Remaining residents are dependent upon on-site sewage disposal systems. Due to soil with low septic suitability, large lot sizes are required in order to ensure safe drinking water in accordance with Title V setback restrictions; tight tanks are often required to adhere to proper Board of Health regulations. Such systems, as well as their potential failure, constitute ongoing threats to the quality of the town's lakes and streams. Non-point source pollution, such as landscape-wide runoff, also may adversely affect the quality of water resources. Regular water testing of lakes and streams will help the town understand the extent and severity of this problem.

Long-term Development Patterns

Three residential zones are designated in Ashburnham: Residential-A (R-A), Residential-B (R-B), and Village Center Residential. The majority of Ashburnham's total acreage is in the R-B district, which has greater minimum lot and frontage dimensions (See Table B). Multi-family dwellings are not permitted in either district, with the exception of assisted elderly housing establishments granted a special permit. Absent an allowance for higher density development, large lot size zoning districts can have detrimental effects on open space preservation as they can lead to fragmentation. Current requirements under MGL Chapter 40A Section 3A, *Multi-family Zoning as-of-right in MBTA communities*, requires Ashburnham to develop a high-density as-of-right multi-family zoning district within Town by 2025.

Table B: Minimum lot dimensions of zoning districts in Ashburnham, MA.

District	Area (square-feet)	Frontage (feet)
R-A	45,000	150
R-B	60,000	200
G-B	60,000	200
LI-A	60,000	150
LI-B	60,000	150
B	25,000	125
VC-C	0	20
VC-R	10,000	75
I	60,000	150

There are three types of commercial district: the Village Center (V-C), located at the confluence of Route 12 and Route 101, the Business District (B), located at the intersection of Route 101 and South Main Street, as well as at the intersection of Route 119 and Route 101, and the Green Business District (G-B), located along Route 119 (see zoning map at the end of this section). The Green Business Zone is intended to foster businesses that will support tourism and passive outdoor recreation, while preserving the natural beauty and ecological significance of the area. Currently there are no businesses located within the Green Business district and the Select Board has expressed concern that it allows for a residential development variance as currently written. This suggests that consideration of a review and potential revision of the bylaw may be prudent. The Town also has regular Industrial Zoning (I) Districts: one in the Village Center, which includes the Flo-Chemical property and Triumph Play Systems, and the second in South Ashburnham north of Route 101. Light Industrial District-B exists in the west central portion of the town, north and south of Route 12, while the Light Industrial-A Overlay District exists in South Ashburnham north and south of Route 101.

Prior to the OSRP 2014 Update, there were several residential developments under construction or in the pre-construction phase, including Cashman Hill Estates on Cashman Hill Road, Lakeside Village on Sherbert Road, Lakeview Estates on Holt Road, Bray Avenue Subdivision off Williams Road, and the Whitney Park Developments, a 40B development in South Ashburnham to provide some affordable housing within the proposed 98 condominiums and 17 single-family homes. However, until recently, the economic downturn significantly affected much of this new construction. Cashman Hill Estates has been completed, as has the Bray Avenue Subdivision. In mid-2021, a 50 +/- house residential development was proposed for the same property formerly proposed for the 40B development.

During the past 6 years, new residential development has been modest, with the number of building permits issued for new residences ranging from 12 in 2018 to 30 in 2016.²⁵ Building permits for the demolition of existing residences and residential redevelopment on the same site ranged from 2 in 2018 and 2019, to 5 in 2020.²⁶ Future growth also is expected to be modest, at best.

Regardless, the capacity of the town's current drinking water supply, Upper Naukeag Lake, to support additional growth is not unlimited. As such, other possible drinking water sources, including groundwater aquifers, need to be examined and protected. Documenting a potential system of redundancy relative to the provision of potable water, in conjunction with the protection of its recharge areas, would serve to allay concerns regarding future development and increases in the local population, each of which would encourage the ongoing conservation of open space and recreational lands.

As previously indicated, the Town has recently established a Bylaw Review Committee to evaluate the effectiveness and need for potential improvements to the Town's existing bylaws. Such improvements will be beneficial to long-term development planning and should increase the effectiveness and enforceability of many of the Town's existing bylaws. Strong, efficiently implemented, up-to-date, and enforceable, land-use protection, stormwater, low-impact design

²⁵ Personal Communication with Heather Ruziak. December 8, 2021. Land Use Administrator. Town of Ashburnham, MA.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Ruziak.

and development, open space residential design, and sustainable development bylaws, policies, and best management practices can benefit long-term community resilience relative to smart-growth, natural resource protection, and hazard mitigation.

Awareness of recent development trends can help a town prepare for potential future growth through the promotion and implementation of smart growth, sustainable development principals...

SECTION 4



Environmental Inventory and Analysis



Section 4. Environmental Inventory and Analysis

A. Geology, Soils, and Topography

Most of Ashburnham's topography consists of rolling, hilly terrain ranging from 1,832 feet on Mount Watatic, to 840 feet where Phillips Brook flows into Fitchburg. Steep slopes at high elevations form the divide between the Northeast Coastal Plains and the Connecticut River Valley ecoregions (see Slopes Map, Appendix A). A rich geological and glacial history with alternating periods of volcanic activity, shifting faults, and erosion led to the formation of igneous and metamorphic rock almost 500 million years ago. Glacial sculpting wore deep grooves in the land, creating the hilly landscape visible today (see **Figure 4 – Slopes Map**).

As the glaciers advanced, materials scraped from the underlying bedrock were carried south. Consequently, bedrock outcrops are abundant (e.g., Mt. Watatic, Lesser Watatic, Nutting Hill, Mt. Hunger, Fisher Hill, Brown Hill, and the area of steep slopes between the Rindge Turnpike and Byfield Road) and the surficial geology of the town consists primarily of glacial till. As described by Peterson (1984), Ashburnham also is not without its 'geologic' faults, with the most prominent being the Stodge Meadow Fault which extends from New Hampshire through Ashby, then southward between Watatic Pond and Billy Ward Pond, through Stodge Meadow Pond, and Factory Village Pond.²⁷ Peterson also described and mapped the bedrock geology of the Ashburnham/Ashby area and environs as shown in **Figure 5A – Bedrock Geology**.

Warming temperatures caused the retreat of ice sheets, which left glacial debris, eskers, drumlins, and moraines in their wake. Surficial deposits primarily consist of glacial till, a non-sorted, non-stratified matrix of sand, some silt, and little clay containing scattered gravel fragments and a few large boulders (see **Figures 5B and 5C – Surficial Geology**). Glacial stratified deposits consisting mainly of coarse gravel-sized fragments, cobbles and boulders, and minor amounts of sand are most abundant in the vicinity of Billy Ward Pond, between Lake Watatic and Lower Naukeag Lake, and from Lake Wampanoag north to Lower Naukeag and west along the Millers River. Postglacial deposits of floodplain alluvium exist along Bluefield and Bear Meadow Brooks. Swamp deposits are associated with Lincoln Pond, Cheshire Pond, the waterway and wetlands between Cheshire Pond and the Millers River, the waterways and wetlands between Packard Hill and Sherbert Roads, and other scattered locations throughout Town.²⁸ These features impede drainage and have contributed to the formation of the Town's wetlands and natural ponds. While hilly terrain, steep slopes, wetlands, and areas of poorly draining soils provide diverse wildlife habitat and ecology, they are less suitable for development and limit the extent of developable lands in Ashburnham. Development and the logging of steep, upland areas warrant careful site plan review and the implementation and routine monitoring and maintenance of site-specific erosion controls. This is especially important within the Upper Naukeag Lake watershed, the Town's drinking water supply. Restricting development in sensitive areas and protecting appropriate open space will aid in the preservation of Ashburnham's soil and water quality.

²⁷ Peterson, Virginia. May 1984. *Structure and Stratigraphy of Bedrock in the Ashburnham-Ashby Area, North-Central Massachusetts*. Contribution No. 47. Dept. of Geology and Geography. University of Massachusetts. Amherst, MA.

²⁸ Stone, Janet R. 2013. *Surficial Geologic Map of the Ashburnham Quadrangle, Massachusetts*. US Geological Survey.

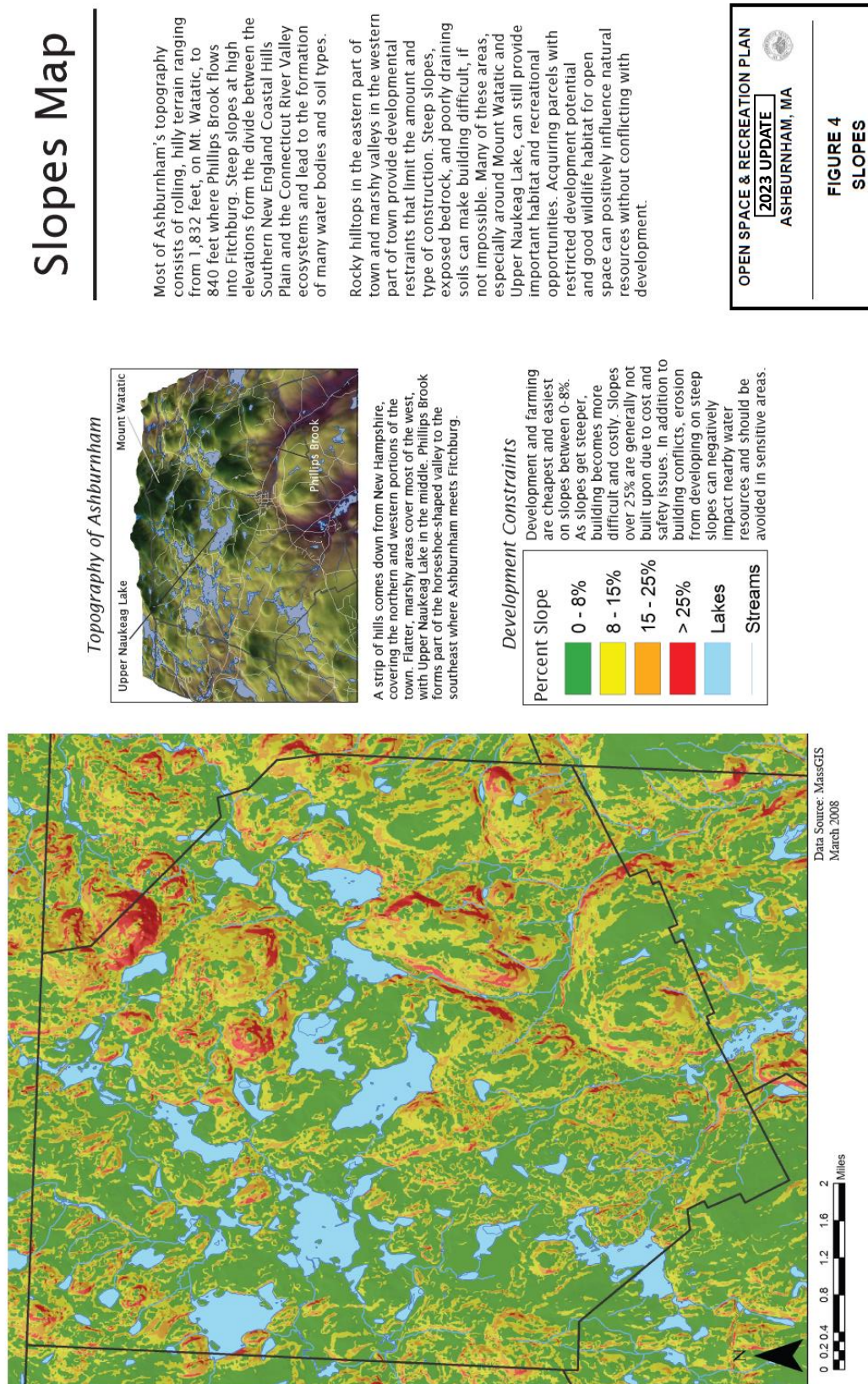


FIGURE 4. SLOPES MAP

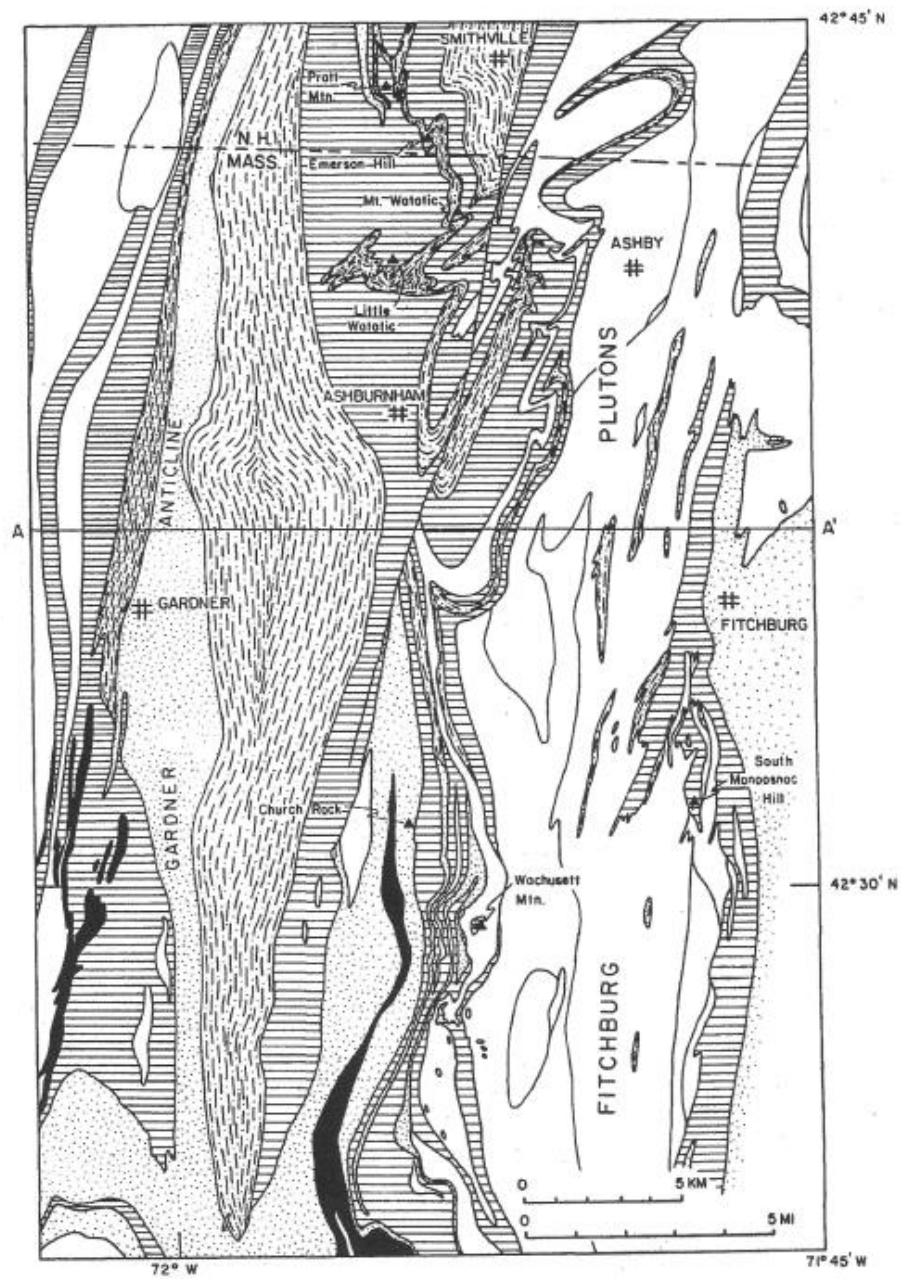
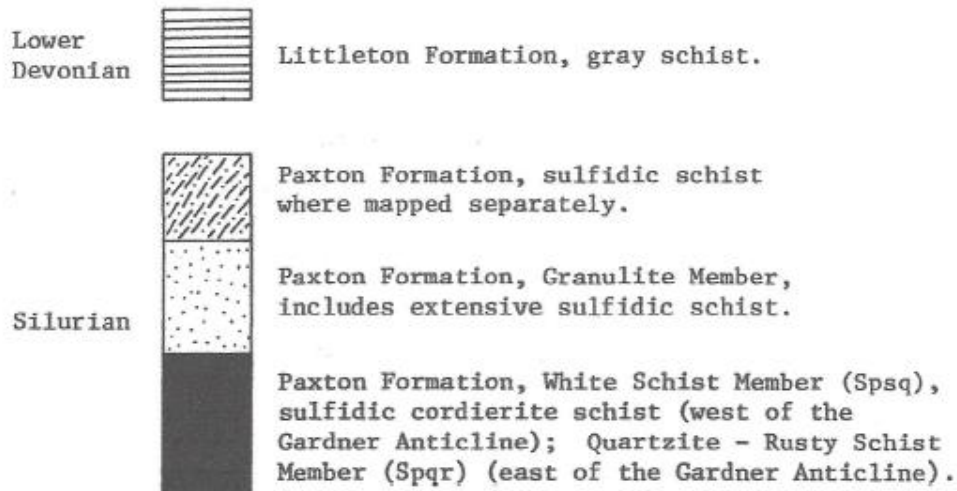


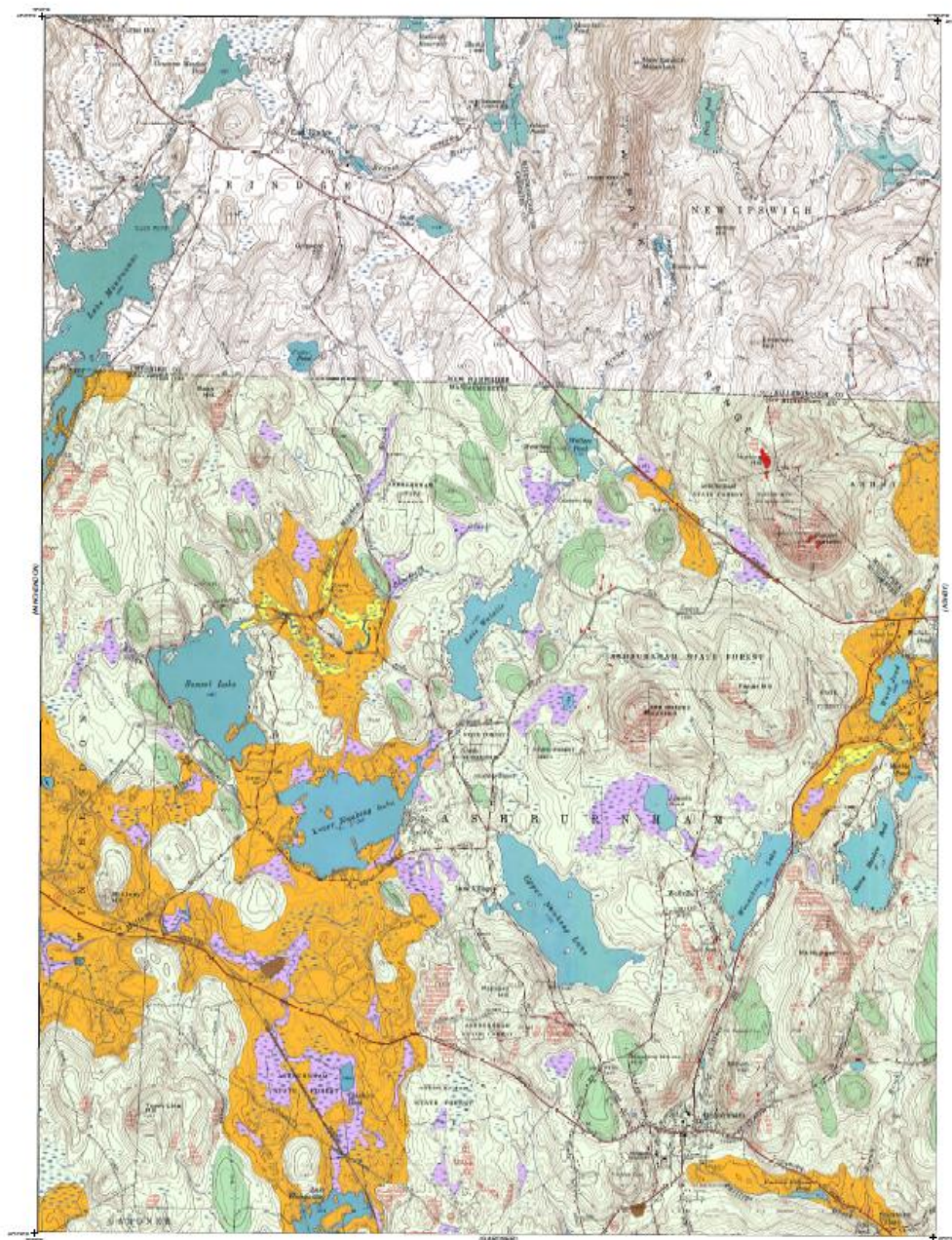
FIGURE 5A. BEDROCK GEOLOGY

KEY TO FIGURE 5A

Geologic map of part of north-central Massachusetts showing one possible structural correlation between the Wachusett Mountain and Ashburnham-Ashby areas. This interpretation requires minor offset along the Stodge Meadow Pond Fault and correlates the tonalite in the Ashburnham-Ashby area with the tonalite on Wachusett Mountain.

Only Silurian - Devonian stratified rocks are patterned.





Base Data: U.S. Geological Survey, 1963.
Map was revised, corrected, generalized,
and compiled by the Massachusetts
Geological Survey.



Geology compiled by R. J. Stone in 1978 (unpublished).
Bedrock geology and shallow bedrock units in the western
part of the quadrangle were reproduced from Peterson (1966,
p. 5). Some surface and geological units compiled using
2000 orthophoto images.

Surficial Geologic Map of the Ashburnham Quadrangle, Massachusetts

Compiled by Janet R. Stone
2013



OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN
2023 UPDATE
ASHBURNHAM, MA
FIGURE 5B - SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

FIGURE 5B. SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

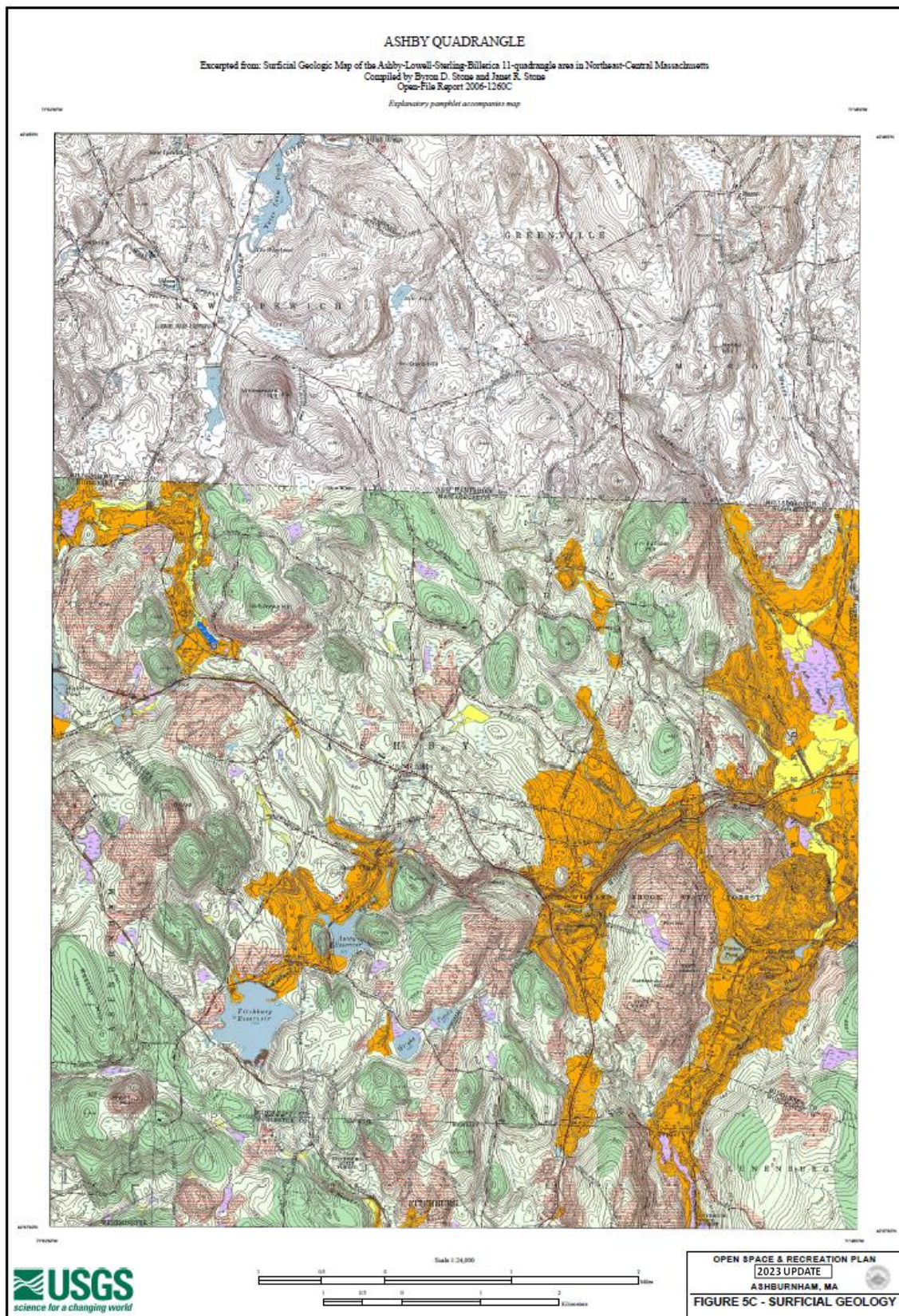


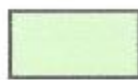
FIGURE 5C. SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

KEY TO FIGURES 5B & 5C

ASHBURNHAM, MA

FIGURES 5B & 5C SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

GLACIAL TILL DEPOSITS

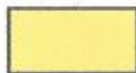


Thin Till (<10-15 Feet)



Thick Till (>10-15 Feet)

GLACIAL STRATIFIED DEPOSITS



Course Deposits

POST-GLACIAL DEPOSITS



Floodplain Alluvium



Swamp Deposits

BEDROCK AREAS



Bedrock Outcrops/Shallow Bedrock

Source: Stone (2013) (See Footnote #24)

As mapped and described by the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the dominant soil type in Ashburnham is the Peru-Marlow association (see **Appendix A, Figure A1**). It is characterized by a fine sandy loam texture, and a surface area covered with cobbles, stones, and boulders. Although moderately well drained, it is susceptible to erosion, and has a restrictive feature from 21 to 43 inches below the ground surface, thus constraining its septic suitability. The dominant hydric (wetland) soil consists of Bucksport and Wonsqueak mucks, Naumberg fine sandy loam and Searsport loamy sand, all of which are very poorly drained and subject to frequent ponding. These soils are associated with Lincoln and Cheshire Ponds, and the extensive wetland areas along Route 119 in northeastern Ashburnham.²⁹

Agriculture and Farmland Soils

The Town's prime farmland soils are characterized by Canton fine sandy loam (3-8% slopes), Paxton fine sandy loam (3-8% slope), and Woodbridge fine sandy loam (0-8% slope) (see **Figure 6 – Farmland Soils**).³⁰

Portions of the farmland associated with The Trustees of Reservations (TTR) Jewell Hill Conservation Area consists of Paxton and Woodbridge soils. Farmland of Statewide Importance includes Canton fine sandy loam (8-15% slope), Canton fine sandy loam, very stony (0-15% slopes), Hinckley loamy sand (0-15% slopes), Hinckley loamy sand, very stony (3-15% slopes), Paxton fine sandy loam (8-15% slopes), Paxton fine sandy loam, very stony (0-15% slopes), Woodbridge fine sandy loam (8-15% slope), and Woodbridge fine sandy loam, very stony (0-15% slopes). These soils are located on outwash deltas, outwash terraces, kame terraces, moraines, eskers, outwash plains, drumlins, hills, and ridges. Their occurrence in Ashburnham is limited, primarily due to the Town's elevation and landscape position during past glacial periods.

Despite suboptimal soil conditions throughout much of the Town, many farms are located in Ashburnham and constitute an essential part of the Town's open space (see **Appendix A, Listing of Active Farms in Ashburnham**, and **Appendix A, Figures A2-A**, and **A2-B**). Besides adding to the rural and aesthetic character of the town, farms contribute to regional food security. While most farms listed are small, selling eggs and produce, most of the town's agricultural area is devoted to hay and livestock, and occupy relatively large amounts of land. Even though a few small farms have emerged in the last decade, the overall area of farmland has declined significantly over the last 50 years (see **Figure 7**). The town had over twice as much working farmland in 1971 as it has now. Furthermore, while Ashburnham now has over two dozen parcels that would be considered farmland, only five of these parcels are permanently protected (see **Appendix A, Figures A2, A&B**).

²⁹ Web Soil Survey. US Dept. of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service. See <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>

³⁰ https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcseprd1338623.html

FARMLAND SOILS

Ashburnham's landscape is characterized by rocky uplands and lowland soils with low infiltration rates, resulting in upland sites with high runoff potential and lowland marshiness. The town's prime farmland soils are characterized by Canton, Paxton, and Woodbridge fine sandy loam.

Prime soils especially found in valleys and along the western border. The town's geological features take the form of gravel pits, rock outcrops, and marked wet spots. This mix of steep slopes and marshiness also limits Ashburnham in terms of development: much of the town is considered low potential for construction of homes, based on soil type. Few soils have potential for frequent flooding (based on dominant flood probability for map unit). Many areas have high runoff potential, with a hydrological classification of D, AD, or CD.



Soils designated very limited for building of dwellings.

Legend

Prime Farm Soils

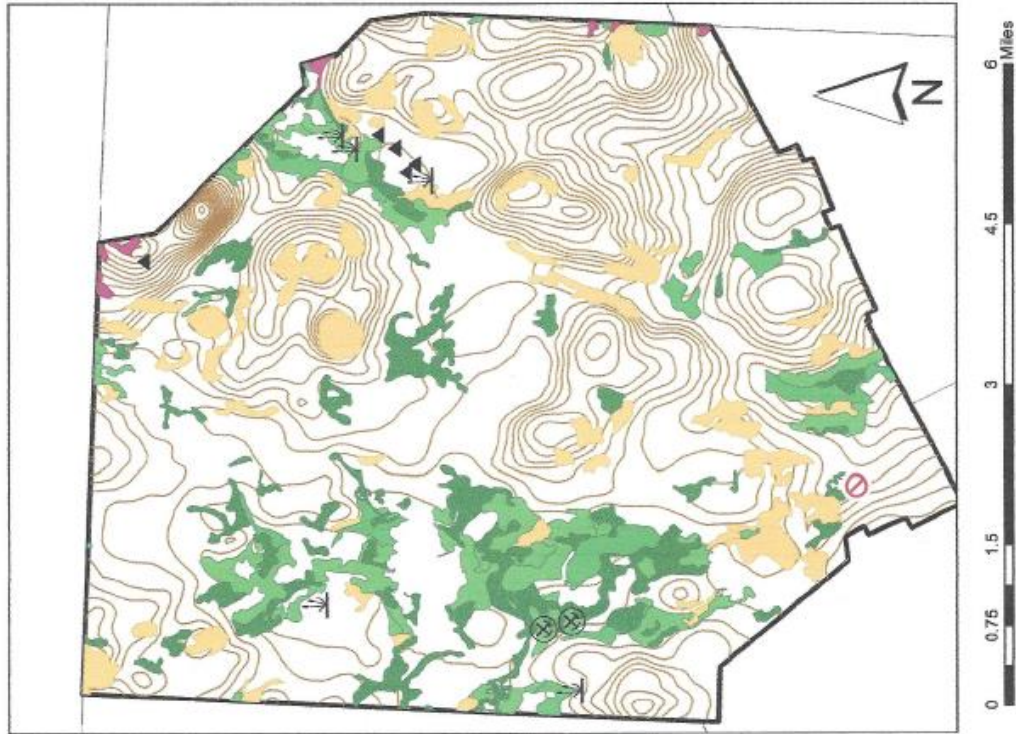
- All areas are prime farmland
- Farmland of statewide importance
- Farmland of unique importance

Geological Features

- X Gravel Pit
- Rock Outcrop
- Wet Spot
- X Potentially Hazardous Site

Soil Classification

- Frequently Flooded Soils
- High Runoff Potential Soils
- Very Limited for Dwelling Soils



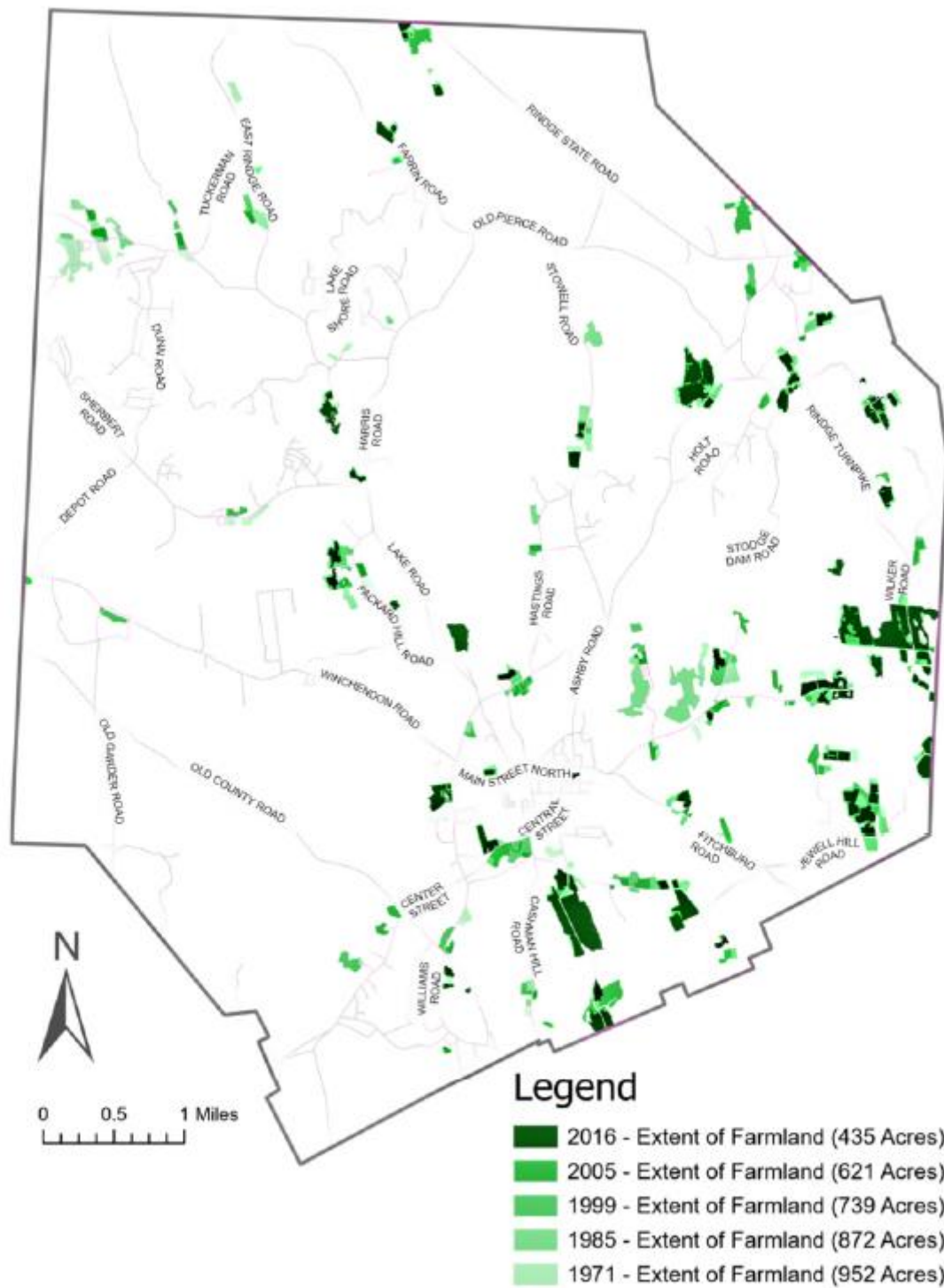
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FIGURE 6

FIGURE 6. FARMLAND SOILS



Prepared by: Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
 Sources: Mount Grace Ashburnham Farmland Inventory and MassGIS

FIGURE 7. HISTORICAL LOSS OF FARMLANDS 1971-2016

B. Landscape Character

The view from the summit of Mount Watatic, in the northeast corner of Ashburnham, presents rolling forested hills interrupted by lakes, streams, and wetlands, and interspersed with historic residential and industrial districts and agricultural lands. From this vantage point, the history of human use on the land is evident by the location of old buildings along streams that once supported the vibrant mill industry, and the cleared land and farmhouses that represent the once-dominant land use in Ashburnham. One of the most important assets of the Town is its open space, including open water, forest, and historic farmland.

Approximately seven percent of the Town is covered in surface water, including large, constructed reservoirs and natural streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. These waterbodies form the headwaters of three different watersheds: the Millers, the Nashua, and the Souhegan. Waterbodies, particularly lakes, play a key role in the residential make-up and economy of the Town, as people are drawn here for water-based recreation and waterfront living. Beyond their aesthetic and recreational values for humans, the water resources also provide habitat to a variety of wildlife and plant species and provide drinking water to Town residents.

The potential exists to link large, protected areas to form wildlife and recreation corridors. In recent years, several large properties have been connected to form contiguous areas of protected land. On Mount Watatic, 281 acres are currently protected, including the 1,832-foot-high bald summit where hikers on the Midstate Trail can glimpse views of Boston, Mount Monadnock, Mount Wachusett, Mount Greylock, and Worcester. Mount Watatic was named one of Massachusetts's 1,000 most important protected areas in 2010. A 211-acre section of the Ashburnham State Forest, the Department of Fish and Game's 150-acre Watatic Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary, and the 263-acre Ashby Wildlife Management Area abuts the Mount Watatic Reservation to form a substantial area of contiguous open space. The early 2021 purchase of over 200 acres of land in Ashburnham and Ashby on the south slope of Mount Watatic by the North County Land Trust was a major addition to existing conserved lands blanketing the mountain.

Another important wildlife corridor is between Mount Watatic and adjacent Nutting Hill, a Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) core habitat featuring Priority Natural Communities.³¹

Nutting Hill is located on the ninety-two-mile Midstate Trail that traverses the length of the town, on public and private lands, from Rhode Island to Mount Watatic where it joins the Wapack Trail and continues another twenty-eight miles into New Hampshire.

In addition to Ashburnham's scenic forests, several historic farmlands also exist throughout the Town. The Cambridge Grant Historic Farm District, one of the earliest settlements in Town, was listed on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places in August 2001 and is enjoyed by residents for its scenic beauty and historical importance. Many of the old farms in Ashburnham are prime areas for development due to their convenient and accessible locations. Only 65 acres, located in South Ashburnham, are protected from development by an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR).

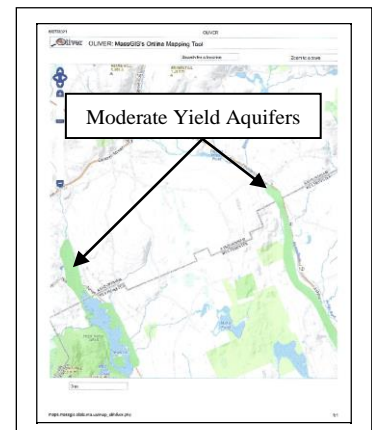
³¹ MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. 2012. *BioMap2 – Ashburnham*. MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Westborough, MA.

C. Water Resources

Twenty lakes and ponds, and numerous streams, brooks, wetlands, bogs, and vernal pools, make up the water resources in Ashburnham. The headwaters for three watersheds begin within its bounds – the Nashua, Millers, and Souhegan (see **Figure 8A – Elevation & Watershed Drainage Map**). Lincoln Pond, which sequentially flows into Lake Winnekeag, Phillips Brook, and the North Branch of the Nashua River forms the headwaters of the Nashua Watershed. Lake Wampanoag is also within the Nashua Watershed and flows south to the Whitman River and then to the North Branch of the Nashua River, which ultimately flows into the Merrimack River in Nashua, New Hampshire. The Millers Watershed begins with waters that drain from Wallace Pond, Lake Watatic, Sunset Lake, and Lower and Upper Naukeag Lakes, which flow west into the Millers River whose confluence with the Connecticut River occurs adjacent to the French King Bridge in the Towns of Erving and Montague. The Souhegan Watershed contains Stodge Meadow Pond, Marble Pond, Billy Ward Pond, and Little Watatic Pond, which all flow north into the Souhegan River and on into the Merrimack River in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

Collectively, these watersheds drain 2,200 square miles of land located within sixty-seven towns in Massachusetts and eleven in New Hampshire. Precipitation and the associated surface and groundwater runoff contributing the source-water of these watershed basins, within Ashburnham, eventually flow through the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers to the Gulf of Maine and Long Island Sound, respectively (See **Figure 8B – Watersheds Regional Context Map**). Because water quality at the headwaters is vital to the health of the entire downstream watershed network, Ashburnham plays a significant, primary role in the quality of our region's rivers and streams. Protecting Ashburnham's lakes and their upstream and downstream watershed lands is essential to ensuring the quality of the Town's drinking water, and much of the region's aquatic ecosystems. Protecting land adjacent to water bodies is one of the best ways to ensure water quality and, therefore, should be a top priority.

In addition to sharing watersheds with its neighbors, Ashburnham shares a valuable drinking water supply. Upper Naukeag Lake, a 240-acre reservoir, supplies drinking water to both Ashburnham and Winchendon residents. Historically, in 1993, the Town established a Water Supply Protection Zoning Overlay District around the lake. A *Source Water Protection Plan* was prepared by the Massachusetts Rural Water Association in 2006, based on a risk assessment that identified residential septic systems as the highest threat to water quality, followed by the transportation of hazardous materials, and roadway runoff. The plan recommended septic systems within the Town to be identified and monitored by the Board of Health every three to five years, and those located along lakefront to be inspected and maintained annually. The plan also suggested the implementation of low-salt areas on winter roadways and installing signs to warn drivers of such areas.



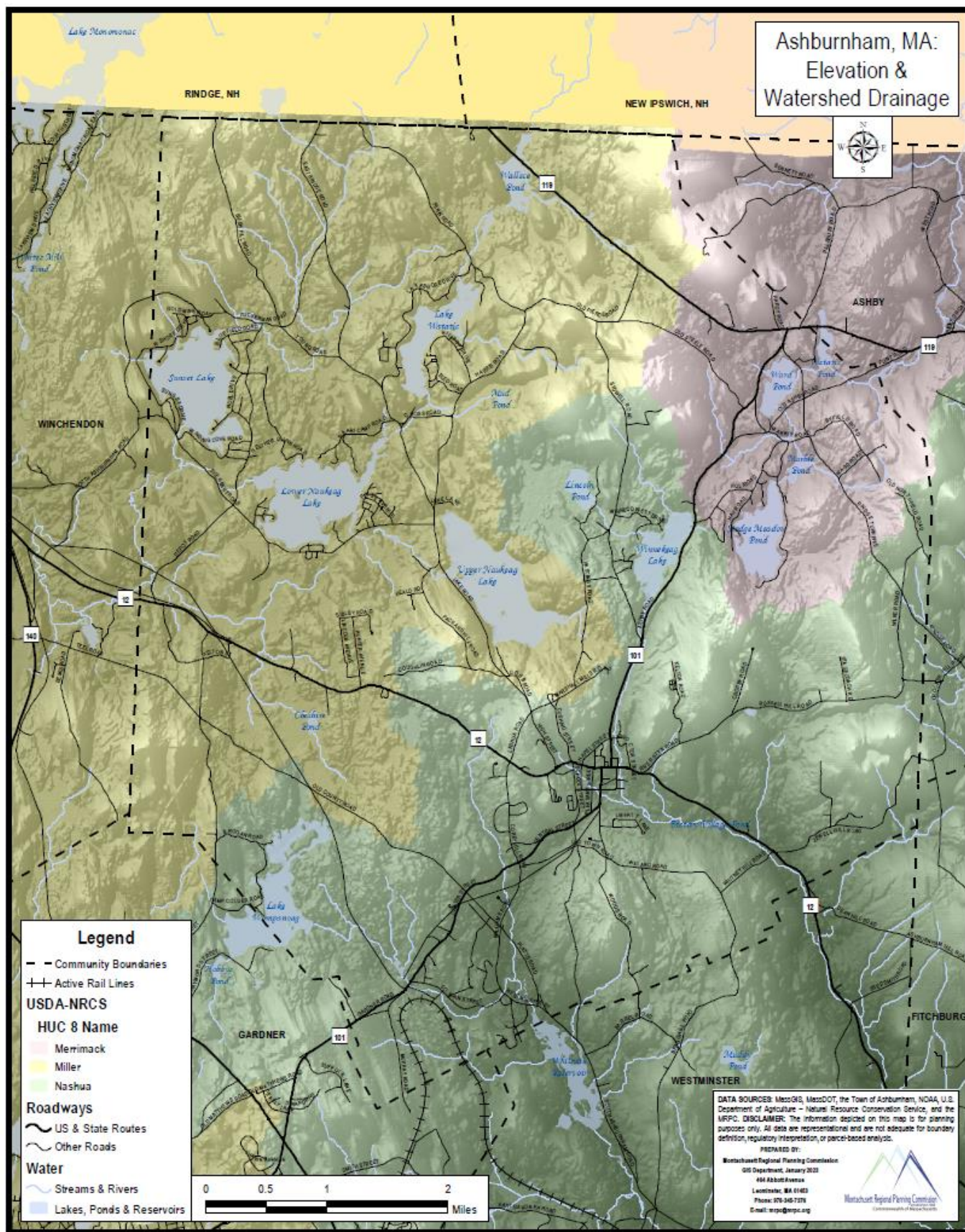


FIGURE 8A. ELEVATION & WATERSHED DRAINAGE MAP

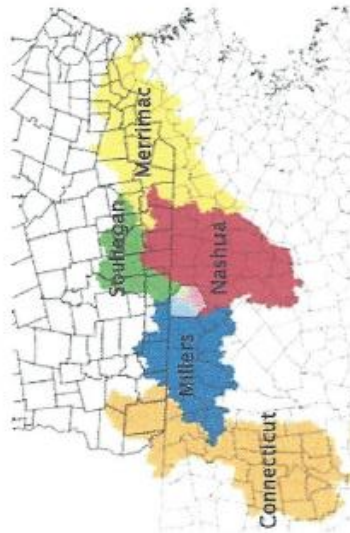
Watersheds

The Nashua Watershed flows northward through Middlesex and Worcester Counties from the Wachusett Reservoir to the Souhegan Watershed basin in Ashburnham and the Merrimack Watershed in southern New Hampshire. Over its course, the basin drains 31 communities, covers 538 square miles, and provides drinking water to more than one million people. In Ashburnham, the watershed encompasses the southern portion of town, including Lake Wampanoag, Winnekeag Lake, Lincoln Pond, and Phillips Brook.

The headwaters of the Millers Watershed are located in New Hampshire and Ashburnham and empty west, into the Connecticut River Watershed. The watershed drains a total of 392 square miles and goes through 17 communities. Some of the steepest areas in Massachusetts are encompassed in the Millers Watershed, 81 percent of which is forest. The remaining 19 percent of land drained by the Millers includes six percent farmland, six percent wetlands, and seven percent urban including the towns of Gardner, Athol, and Orange.

The Souhegan Watershed encompasses a small portion of Ashburnham before draining northeasterly into Ashby and nine communities in New Hampshire. It then meets water from the Nashua Watershed where both drain into the Merrimack, and on to the Atlantic Ocean. The Souhegan drains 170 square miles.

Watershed Context



Directed by the many hills and valleys of Ashburnham, the water flow from all the lakes, ponds, wetlands, vernal pools, streams, and brooks form the headwaters of three watersheds. Collectively, the Nashua, Millers, and Souhegan Watersheds drain 1,100 square miles, thereby creating the largest potential to sustain or degrade communities downstream. Maintaining water quality at the headwaters in Ashburnham should be a priority for enhancing biodiversity and human health in the region as a whole.

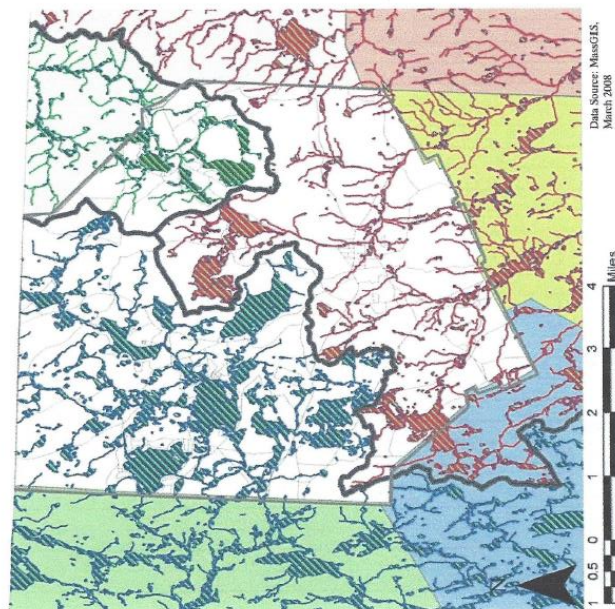
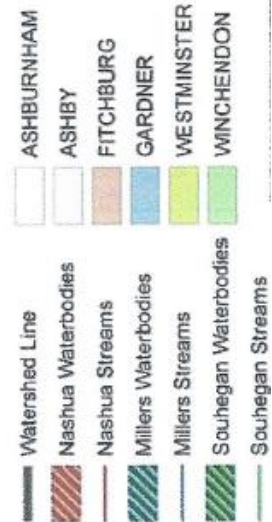
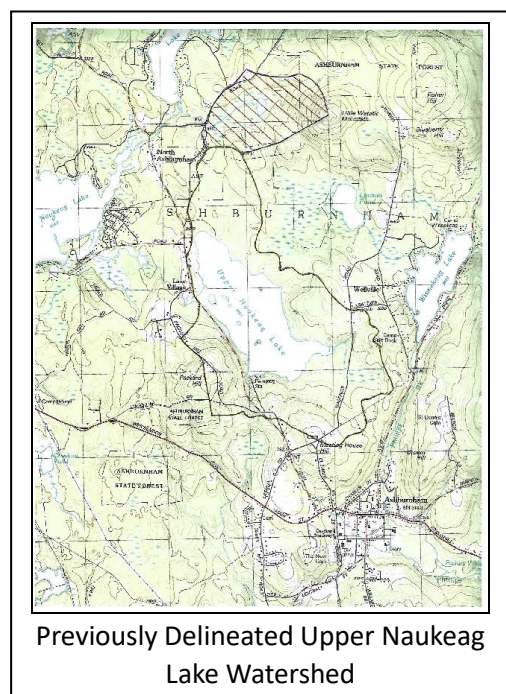


FIGURE 8B. WATERSHEDS REGIONAL CONTEXT MAP

Formerly, there was car-top access to Upper Naukeag Lake for boating, but in 2013 the extant ban on motor boats was extended to rowboats, canoes, and kayaks to better protect this important water supply. Additionally, in 2013 a public health advisory was issued to limit consumption of fish from the lake due to concerns about mercury.

The need to protect Upper Naukeag Lake as a public water supply may be of paramount importance since viable water-bearing aquifers in Ashburnham are highly limited and of lower-yield due to the predominance of surficial deposits consisting of glacial till. Based on MassGIS and as shown in the graphic at right, only deposits along short segments of the Whitman River and Phillips Brook near the Westminster boundary are mapped as moderate yield aquifers.

Ashburnham has taken several other steps to ensure the health of its water resources by creating zoning bylaws relative to Water Supply Protection to help safeguard most of the major water bodies in Town. The Ashburnham Wetlands Protection Bylaw, adopted in 2006, along with the adoption of the Low Impact Development Bylaw in 2008, has also helped protect the Town's water resources.



Currently, Ashburnham continues to work on revisions to its general and zoning bylaws, including the Water Supply Protection (Overlay) District Bylaw, to maintain compliance with MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations. In conjunction with this effort, Ashburnham's 2006 *Source Water Protection Plan* was reviewed and, in part, found to be in error with respect to the limits of the Upper Naukeag Lake watershed. As shown in the graphic at left, the diagonally striped area is not part of the watershed, as it is tributary to Lower Naukeag Lake. In fact, DEP-compliant revisions to the Water Supply Protection (Overlay) District Bylaw and the Upper Naukeag Lake Watershed Map recently were approved at the 3 May 2022 Annual Town Meeting. Thus, such watershed boundary revisions will be incorporated into the updated Water Supply Protection (Overlay) District Bylaw, pending approval from the MA Attorney General's Office.

Open water sources in Ashburnham including lakes, ponds and streams total approximately 2,700 acres (see **Figure 9**). Currently, there is legal public access for recreation to Lake Watatic, Lincoln Pond, Whitney Pond, and Cheshire Pond only; the others provide private access for members of their various lake associations. In terms of public access to water for swimming, the Town's centrally located Bresnahan 'Pool' along Phillips Brook was ideal. However, due to pollutants and lack of maintenance, it presently is unusable. In lieu of a costly restoration, Ashburnham has considered public access to one or more of its many lakes. The Town owns parcels along Lake Watatic, Lower Naukeag, and the smaller Whitney Pond. The latter surface water, however, currently is the subject of a study to potentially remove the dam that creates the pond. Other potential lakes or ponds are inaccessible because they are held by private landowners or are protected for drinking water or conservation.

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FIGURE 9
LAKES & PONDS

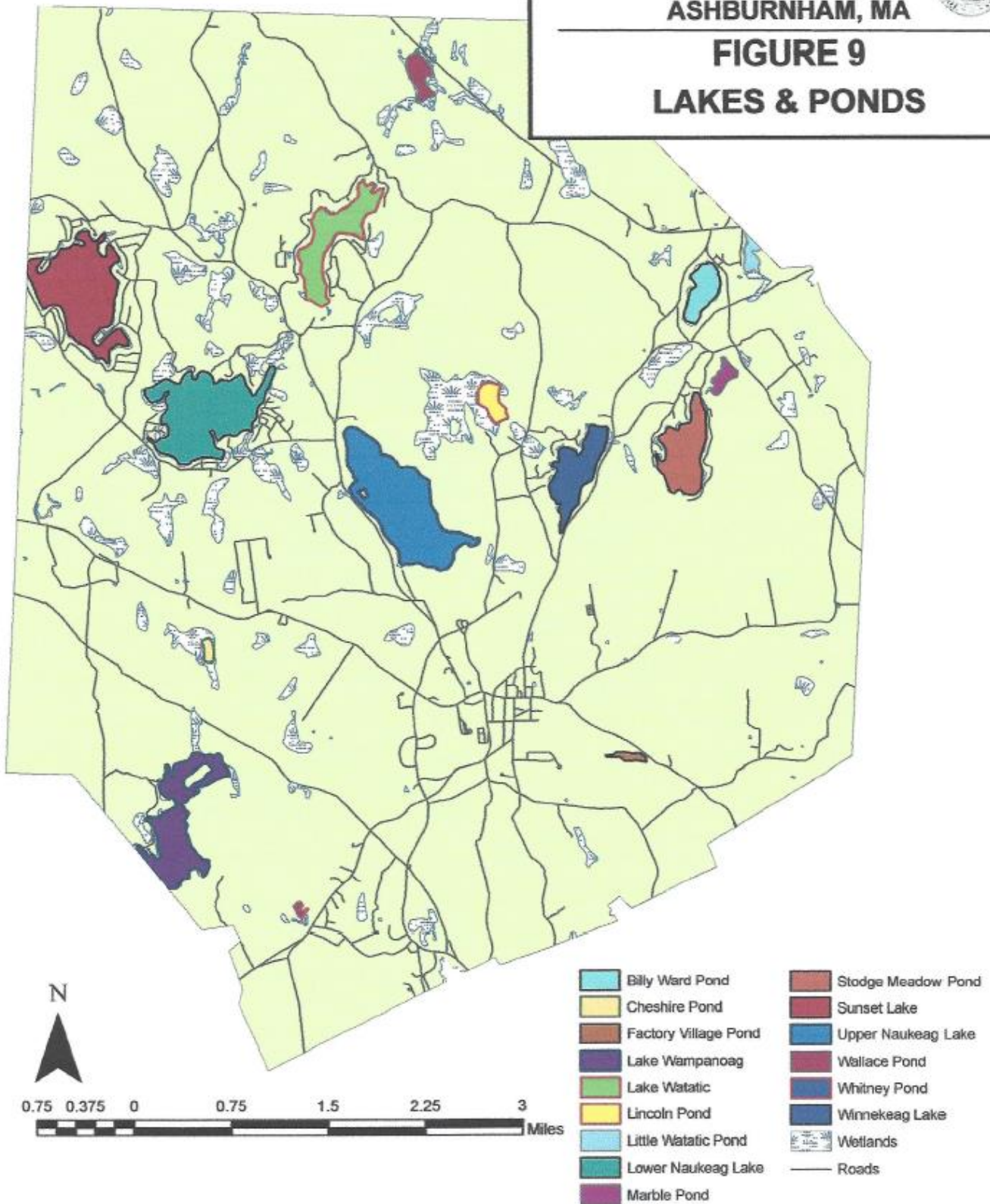


FIGURE 9. LAKES AND PONDS

Despite the extent of existing wetlands, the Town-owned Lake Watatic parcels may be suitable for the establishment of a public beach area, although parking and lake access improvements would be required. Along the lake's northern shore, a relatively small parcel is owned by the Ashburnham Conservation Trust (ACT) and is open to the public for swimming, canoe access, and picnics, although the access road to this parcel presently is in disrepair and in need of improvement.

Several lakes and ponds have been created over the years for industrial and recreational uses. Ashburnham's high elevation streams, such as Bluefield Brook, historically were dammed to create mill ponds, while others supplied power to parts of the Town, and dams at Lake Wampanoag and Lake Winnekeag were created and maintained for the paper industry of Fitchburg. A sluiceway at Little Watatic Pond controlled the flow of water that served the Whitney Manufacturing Mills in New Ipswich (NH), which once was the largest woolen supplier in the United States.

Dams at several lakes are now controlled and maintained by lake associations. The lake associations use the dams to control the level of their lakes for recreational and aesthetic purposes within boundaries set by the Conservation Commission, which tries to maintain water quality and ecological health by implementing both the State and local wetlands by-law regulations and providing permits on an as needed basis. Typically, lake drawdowns commence in mid-October to facilitate dock and boat maintenance, as well as to inhibit the growth of nuisance aquatic vegetation and invasive species like Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*). Other nuisance aquatic species controlled both by lake drawdowns and herbicide treatments include variable watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum heterophyllum*), bladderwort (*Utricularia* spp.), pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.), water shield (*Brasenia schreberi*), and water lilies (*Nymphaea* spp.). Some of the residential water bodies, such as Billy Ward Pond, Lake Watatic, Lower Naukeag Lake, Sunset Lake, Wallace Pond, and Little Watatic Pond, have experienced eutrophication in the shallow waters due to the impacts of non-point source pollution, road runoff, and shoreline development. In the late spring of 2021, a 'no contact' advisory for humans and pets was issued by the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health relative to the presence of potentially toxic cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms (cyanoHABs) in Billy ward Pond and Lake Winnekeag. Such HABs may produce cyanotoxins harmful to humans and dogs.

Future water quality conditions also may be compromised by inappropriate development patterns, the proximity of water bodies to antiquated septic systems, and the lack of vegetative buffer zones around lake developments.

Although Ashburnham does have some issues with flooding, these issues are mainly caused by beavers rather than extreme storm events. Beaver-related flooding has the potential to affect sewage disposal systems and wells of property owners proximate to the flooded areas. In 2021, two (2) Emergency Certifications were issued by the Conservation Commission to address beaver-related flooding issues.

The most recent Flood Insurance Rate Maps issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the Town were published in June 1984. While the FEMA maps have been updated in other Worcester County communities, and local updated maps for Ashburnham and other County municipalities are in the process of being prepared and reviewed, they have not yet been formally published by FEMA.

Most areas subject to flooding during 100-year storm events occur along the Town's major waterways, including the Millers River, the Whitman River, Phillips Brook, and Bear Meadow Brook. However, 100-year flood elevations have only been established by FEMA for the Whitman River south of the Whitney Pond Dam and Phillips Brook south of the Lake Winnekeag Dam.

With respect to flooding and consistent with the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, Ashburnham is one of the 22 communities available to receive FEMA hazard mitigation grants per the *Montachusett Region Hazard Mitigation Plan 2015 Update*, prepared by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC). The Plan identified hazards within the Montachusett Region and evaluated their potential impacts to specific locations relative to past occurrences, existing conditions, and known vulnerabilities, and established a mitigation strategy to reduce risks. This multi-jurisdictional, regional Hazard Mitigation Plan expired in 2020, resulting in the need for several Montachusett Region Towns, including Ashburnham, to develop a local Hazard Mitigation Plan for approval by FEMA. In 2021, the Town of Ashburnham's *Local Hazard Mitigation Plan* was updated as part of the MVP planning grant received by the town from the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA).³²

D. Vegetation

Forest covers nearly eighty percent of the Town's area, roughly 20,000 acres. The dominant woodland vegetation consists of mixed deciduous and coniferous forest. Major tree species include red oak, sugar maple, red maple, paper birch, gray birch, yellow birch, hemlock, white pine, and beech. Understory species include immature canopy species, as well as mountain laurel, sheep laurel, hobblebush viburnum, speckled alder, highbush blueberry, winterberry, and black chokeberry. Ashburnham's woodlands are sprinkled with a bountiful array of herbaceous woodland plants including trillium, partridgeberry, wintergreen, numerous and varied ferns and club mosses, and trailing arbutus, the state flower. These native species are found in abundance, for example, on the summit of Mount Watatic, which draws several thousand people year-round for hiking, mountain biking, birding, and hunting. Beyond scenic beauty, upland forests provide habitat for numerous wildlife species, help to stabilize erodible soils, and help filter and clean water entering the three river systems within Ashburnham.

The largest swaths of permanently protected lands are located within the Ashburnham State Forest, Mt. Watatic Reservation, Watatic Mountain State Wildlife Area, the south slope of Mount Watatic (as previously described), and the 900-acre Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club. It is critical to connect and enlarge these permanently protected lands, as well as other areas that serve as habitat for State-listed rare species.

The NHESP has identified several priority habitats for State listed rare plant species in Ashburnham, as well as certified vernal pools, thirty-two of which have been identified at the time of this OSRP 2023 Update. Currently, Ashburnham contains two (2) State-listed endangered plant species under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA). These species include podgrass (*Scheuchzeria palustris*) and the Appalachian Fir-moss (*Huperzia appressa*). There are also three (3) plants listed as threatened: Tuckerman's pondweed (*Potamogeton confervoides*), slender cottongrass (*Eriophorum gracile*), and Bartram's shadbush (*Amelanchier bartramiana*). Plants

³² Pare Corporation. June 2021. *Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan*. Prepared for the Town of Ashburnham. Ashburnham, MA.

listed as species of special concerns are dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium pusillum*), sand violet (*Viola adunca*), and American twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*).³³

Public shade trees are largely limited to the Town Hall, public park properties, and along designated scenic roads, and are maintained on an as needed basis. These trees are regulated by the Town Tree Warden pursuant to MGL Chapter 87, which prohibits the cutting/removal of public shade trees without a duly noticed public hearing and a permit issued by the Tree Warden. Public shade trees along Town roads are also protected by Chapter XI (Use of Public Ways and Places), Section 12 of the Town's General Bylaws, such that they cannot be cut or removed without approval by the Select Board. All changes to the scenery of municipally-designated "scenic roads" require a permit issued by the Planning Board.

Farms, once the dominant land use in Ashburnham, now represent less than five percent of land cover. Cropland, pasture, tree farms and maintained fields of wild blueberries account for a total of 618 acres, mostly scattered throughout the southeast portion of town. The decline of agriculture in Ashburnham in recent decades has led to vegetative succession in once open land. Old fields commonly contain sumac, poplars, and white birch communities that provide critical habitat for several species, such as American woodcock, ruffed grouse, common nighthawks, tree swallows, cedar waxwings, and bluebirds, among others. Old field communities also provide habitat for mice, voles and other species that serve as prey for hawks and owls. Other wildlife species associated with old fields include the Eastern cottontail, woodchuck, coyote, and red fox. Due to their scarcity Statewide, grasslands, shrub lands and open forest lands are actively created, restored and managed by the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife on public lands.³⁴ These early successional habitats and its associated species are the most threatened habitat throughout New England. Therefore, old fields, shrub lands, and thickets should be protected and managed.

Wetlands account for 2,338 acres of land and primarily consist of forest and scrub/shrub wetlands, emergent wetlands, wet meadows, and fens (peat-forming wetlands that rely on groundwater input). These vegetative communities are scattered throughout the Town, with the largest and most contiguous wetlands occurring in the northern portion of Ashburnham, i.e., north of Routes 12 and 101 in association with Lincoln Pond, and along the riparian corridors of Bear Meadow Brook, Bluefield Brook, the Millers River and their collective tributaries (see **Figure 10A**). South of Route 12, extensive wetlands also are associated with Cheshire Pond, a tributary to the Millers River (see **Figure 10B**). As described by Swain and Kearsley, Cheshire and Lincoln Ponds actually constitute 'acidic shrub fens', i.e. wetlands which are less acidic and nutrient-poor than level bogs, and primarily composed of low-growing shrubs interspersed with sphagnum moss.³⁵

³³ MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. December 10, 2021. *State-listed Rare Species of Ashburnham*. See <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>.

³⁴ <https://www.mass.gov/masswildlife-habitat-management>

³⁵ Patricia C. Swain & Jennifer B. Kearsley, Classification of the Natural Communities of Massachusetts, MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Draft 2001 (Version1.3)

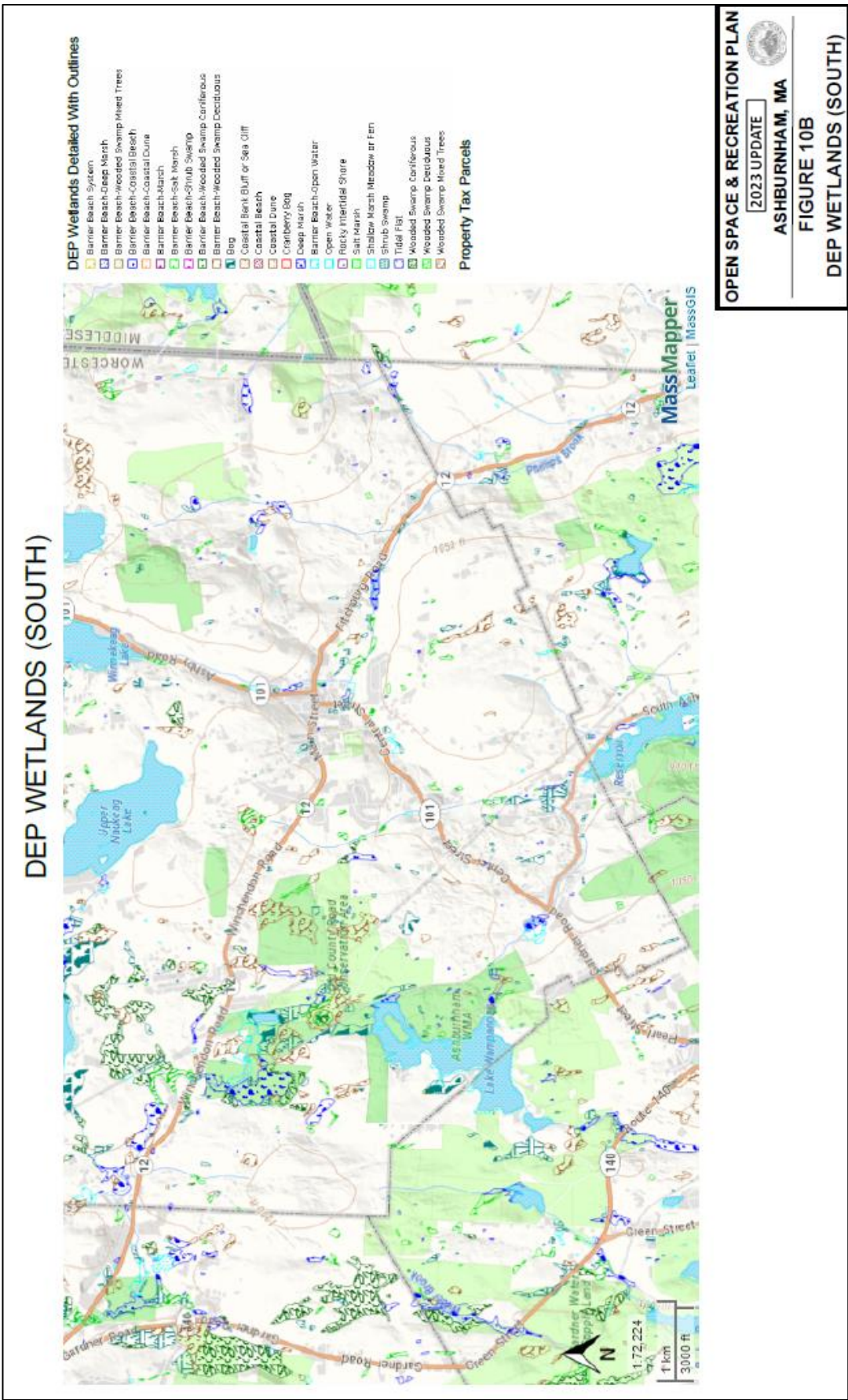


FIGURE 10B. DEP WETLANDS (SOUTH)

The diversity of the Town's wetlands in conjunction with their juxtaposition to varied upland communities markedly enhances their significance, particularly with respect to wildlife habitat. However, these wetlands also play a role relative to other statutory interests of the MA Wetlands Protection Act and implementing regulations, as well as the Town's Wetlands Protection Bylaw. These interests include but are not necessarily limited to the protection of public/private water supply and groundwater, flood control/storm damage prevention, the prevention of pollution, and the protection of fisheries and wildlife.

Fortunately, wetland-related invasive species such as the highly aggressive and exotic purple loosestrife are not commonly found in the wetlands of Ashburnham. Japanese knotweed, another invasive species common to wetlands and uplands, also is limited, primarily occurring along roadsides and the fringes of plant communities. Although not necessarily associated with wetlands, other plant species in Ashburnham characterized as invasive by the MA Invasive Plant Advisory Group include Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), multiflorarose (*Rosa multiflora*), oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), Morrow's Honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*), Dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*), and common reed (*Phragmites australis*).

To curtail the introduction of invasive plant species, the Conservation Commission typically requires the use of straw bales or wattles, rather than hay bale erosion control barriers.

E. Fisheries and Wildlife

Open water, streams, wetlands, forests, mountainous areas, and open fields support diverse populations of organisms. In this regard, there essentially are three (3) groups, i.e. truly aquatic organisms, organisms whose life-sustaining requirements require both aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and truly terrestrial organisms. In fact, it is this diversity of habitats (described below) that fosters the diversity of aquatic/terrestrial species in the Town of Ashburnham.

Lakes, ponds, and streams provide habitat for fisheries, including wild brook trout in multiple coldwater streams. In contrast, lakes and ponds characterized by lower dissolved oxygen concentrations primarily harbor such warmwater fish species as bluegills, pumpkinseeds, blacknose dace, yellow perch, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, and largemouth bass. Surface waters also contain a myriad of aquatic macroinvertebrates, including caddisfly, damselfly and dragonfly larvae, leeches, numerous species of aquatic insects (e.g., whirligig and predacious diving beetles), gastropods (e.g., freshwater snails) and other aquatic organisms, all of which contribute to the aquatic food chain. Emergent, floating leaved, and submergent plant species also are abundant. However, it should be noted that these habitats also serve as life-sustaining components for such wildlife species as bald eagles, common loons, Canada geese, 'dabbling' (e.g., mallards) and 'diving' (e.g., common mergansers) ducks, great blue herons, kingfishers, river otter, mink, muskrat, beaver, raccoon, and a plethora of herpetofauna (e.g., reptiles and amphibians), among other species and groups thereof.

Terrestrial habitats and their associated species composition are no less diverse, from the 1,500-pound male moose (which also is dependent upon aquatic/wetland habitats), to the 12-35 pound porcupine, to the 0.11-ounce ruby-throated hummingbird. Reports of black bears and coyotes have become commonplace on the Ashburnham Group Facebook Page. Gray squirrels and chipmunks are equally ubiquitous. Turkey vultures gliding overhead are everyday observations. Red-tailed hawks and wild turkeys are also frequently observed, as are white-tailed deer. Although less frequently, sharp-shinned hawks have been observed as they dive for a meal of mourning doves,

American robins, or a tufted titmouse at backyard feeders. Numerous other bird species are common to Ashburnham and reflect its location within the Worcester Plateau. The songs of the great horned and barred owls, for example, are unmistakable. In addition, cedar waxwings often are observed as the fruits of mulberry trees ripen, while the tree swallow and Eastern phoebe arrive earlier in the spring to claim their preferred nesting sites. Other species, such as ruffed grouse, cardinals, goldfinch, mourning doves, white-breasted nuthatch, tufted titmouse, black-capped chickadees, and even bluebirds, constitute year-round residents. Multiple snake species also are common to terrestrial habitats, including the Eastern garter snake, milk snake, and smooth green snake, the latter species being associated with a variety of terrestrial and wetland habitats. Reference to the wildlife usage of terrestrial environments would be remiss, however, without noting their significance to the nesting behavior and nest selection of female turtles (e.g., snapping, Eastern painted and Blanding's turtles), who may travel exceptional distances in an effort to locate a suitable nest site.

Wetlands and vernal pools are crucial for maintaining water quality and providing habitat for a host of vertebrates and invertebrates throughout various stages of their lives. The wildlife species currently listed as special concern, threatened, or endangered under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act are largely those that rely on wetlands for survival, such as the Blanding's turtle pictured below. Reptiles and amphibians found in wetlands and vernal pools often cannot migrate to other more suitable areas as a response to disturbances and habitat destruction. Therefore, it is imperative that these types of habitats be carefully monitored and preserved.

Ashburnham is fortunate to have an abundance of wetlands scattered throughout the Town that help maintain water quality and provide habitat for a diverse assemblage and abundance of wildlife species. These include the State-listed endangered American Bittern (*Botarus lentiginosus*), the threatened Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), and five known species of rare dragonflies,



State-Threatened

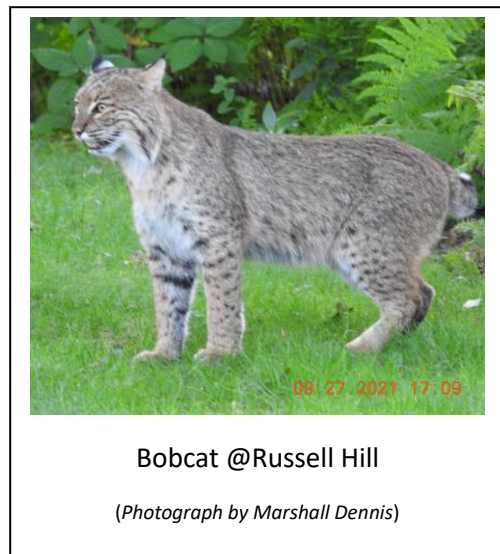
Blanding's Turtle: May 17, 2021

i.e., the Subarctic Darner (*Aeshna subarctica*), the Forcipate Emerald (*Somatochlora forcipata*), the Incurvate Emerald (*Somatochlora incurvata*), the Ski-tipped Emerald (*Somatochlora elongata*), and the Ebony Boghaunter (*Williamsonia fletcheri*). Other State-listed wildlife species occurring in Ashburnham are listed in **Table C**, while State-listed rare species habitat is shown in **Figures 11A and 11B**.

Phillips Brook and other coldwater streams in Ashburnham contain habitat for native brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). The MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife also stocks Phillips Brook and the Whitman River with various trout species during the spring season. Warmwater fish species common to the Town's lakes and ponds include bluegills,

pumpkinseeds, blacknose dace, yellow perch, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, and largemouth bass.

The NHESP has identified twenty-six (26) areas of ‘core habitat’ (i.e., forest, wetland, and aquatic cores) covering just over 4,000 acres and characterized eight (8) vast areas covering a little over 11,000 acres of the Town as ‘critical natural landscape’ under *BioMap2*, published by the NHESP (see Footnote #26). Collectively, these constitute key areas and large natural landscape blocks critical to the long-term persistence of rare species and other species of conservation concern, as well as habitat for wide-ranging native species by maintaining connectivity among habitats. One such species is the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), with males often traveling up to four miles daily.



Large tracts of uninterrupted **Forest Habitat**, or **Forest Cores**, consist of large, intact woodlands that are least impacted by roads and development, providing critical habitat for numerous woodland species.

Table C. State-listed Rare Species – Ashburnham, MA

Taxonomic Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	Status	Most Recent Observations
Bird	<i>Gavia immer</i>	Common Loon	SC	2018
	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	American Bittern	E	2018
Reptile	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	Blanding’s Turtle	T	2021*
	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Wood Turtle	SC	2014
Dragonfly	<i>Aeshna subarctica</i>	Subarctic Darner	E	2001
	<i>Somatochlora elongata</i>	Ski-tipped Emerald	SC	2015
	<i>Somatochlora forcipata</i>	Forcipate Emerald	E	2005
	<i>Somatochlora incurvata</i>	Incurvate Emerald	E	2005
Butterfly/Moth	<i>Callophrys lanoraieensis</i>	Bog Elfin	T	2019
	<i>Papaipema appassionate</i>	Pitcher Plant Borer Moth	T	2009

Vascular Plant	<i>Linnaea borealis</i> ssp. <i>americana</i>	American Twinflower	SC	2015
	<i>Potamogeton confervoides</i>	Tuckerman's Pondweed	T	2009
	<i>Scheuchzeria palustris</i>	Pod-grass	E	2018
	<i>Viola adunca</i>	Sand Violet	SC	2019
	<i>Amelanchier bartramiana</i>	Bartram's Shadbush	T	2021
	<i>Moneses uniflora</i>	One-flowered Pyrola	SC	2000
	<i>Huperzia appressa</i>	Appalachian Fir-moss	E	1896
	<i>Arceuthobium pusillum</i>	Eastern Dwarf Mistletoe	SC	2009
	<i>Eriophorum gracile</i>	Slender Cottongrass	T	2019
* Personal observation by Marshall Dennis and Andrew Henderson				

Critical **Wetland Habitat** or **Wetland Cores** include the least disturbed wetlands within undeveloped landscapes, while aquatic cores signify integrated and functional ecosystems for fish species and other aquatic Species of Conservation Concern. These latter sites represent lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams that are important for the protection of freshwater biodiversity in Massachusetts. In Ashburnham, these waters include Cheshire and Lincoln Ponds and adjacent aquatic habitats, Wallace Pond, and the downstream wetland complex south of Swallow Hill, Wampanoag Lake, Upper Naukeag Lake, the lower riparian corridors of the unnamed tributaries that flow from Upper Naukeag Lake to Naukeag Lake, and the wetland complex east and south of Billy Ward Pond. Most of these aquatic habitats remain undeveloped but vary in protection and proximity to developed areas, particularly other lakes.

Mount Watatic, a Mass Audubon Society-designated **Important Bird Area**, and “one of the premier hawk migration and observation sites in the Northeast”,³⁶ constitutes a core habitat with respect to NHESP **Priority Natural Communities**, specifically the acidic rocky summit characterized by open communities of shrubs, scattered grasses, mosses, lichens, and occasional trees. As a whole, the Reservation provides habitat for both large and small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. The rocky outcroppings are preferred den sites of gray foxes, fishers, raccoons, skunks, porcupines, and bobcats. Smaller mammals, especially bats, seek shelter in caves and under cliff overhangs.

³⁶ Mass Audubon Society. December 11, 2021. *Site Summary: Mt. Watatic*. See <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/bird-conservation-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-iba/iba-sites/mt-watatic>

To date, thirty-two **Vernal Pools** in Ashburnham have been certified by the NHESP. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has established specific criteria and guidelines for qualifying and certifying vernal pools.³⁷

The NHESP defines vernal pools as:

“temporary bodies of fresh water that provide important habitat for many vertebrate and invertebrate species. “Vernal” means spring, and indeed, many vernal pools are filled by spring rains and snowmelt, and then dry during the summer. However, many vernal pools are filled by autumn rains (i.e., “autumnal pools”) and persist through the winter and others are semi-permanent and do not dry every year. Vernal pools are quite often very small and shallow; vernal pools that support rich communities of vertebrate and invertebrate animals may measure only a few yards across. However, vernal pools of several acres also occur throughout Massachusetts.”

Presently, protected open space and other undeveloped lands provide favorable conditions for larger and more diverse wildlife populations. One example of a large, protected area is the Wapack Mountain Range, which serves as a major wildlife corridor from North Ashburnham to southern New Hampshire. As long as large, forested areas remain intact and the interior habitat unfragmented, large mammals like deer, moose, and bear will continue to thrive in Ashburnham. Currently, the deer and moose population in Town is stable and sightings of young bull moose have been made proximate to the Town’s lakes and streams. Black bears have also been sighted within the Town borders and it is not uncommon to hear coyotes at night. The Town’s extensive wetland, stream, and lake habitat also benefits many other species with characteristically large home ranges.

Lasting protection of ecologically valuable, scenic, functional, and productive open space is necessary to preserve Ashburnham’s many natural assets far into the future.

³⁷ https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidelines-for-the-certification-of-vernal-pool-habitat/download?_ga=2.223694235.1208276173.1639185196-10741693.1636919209

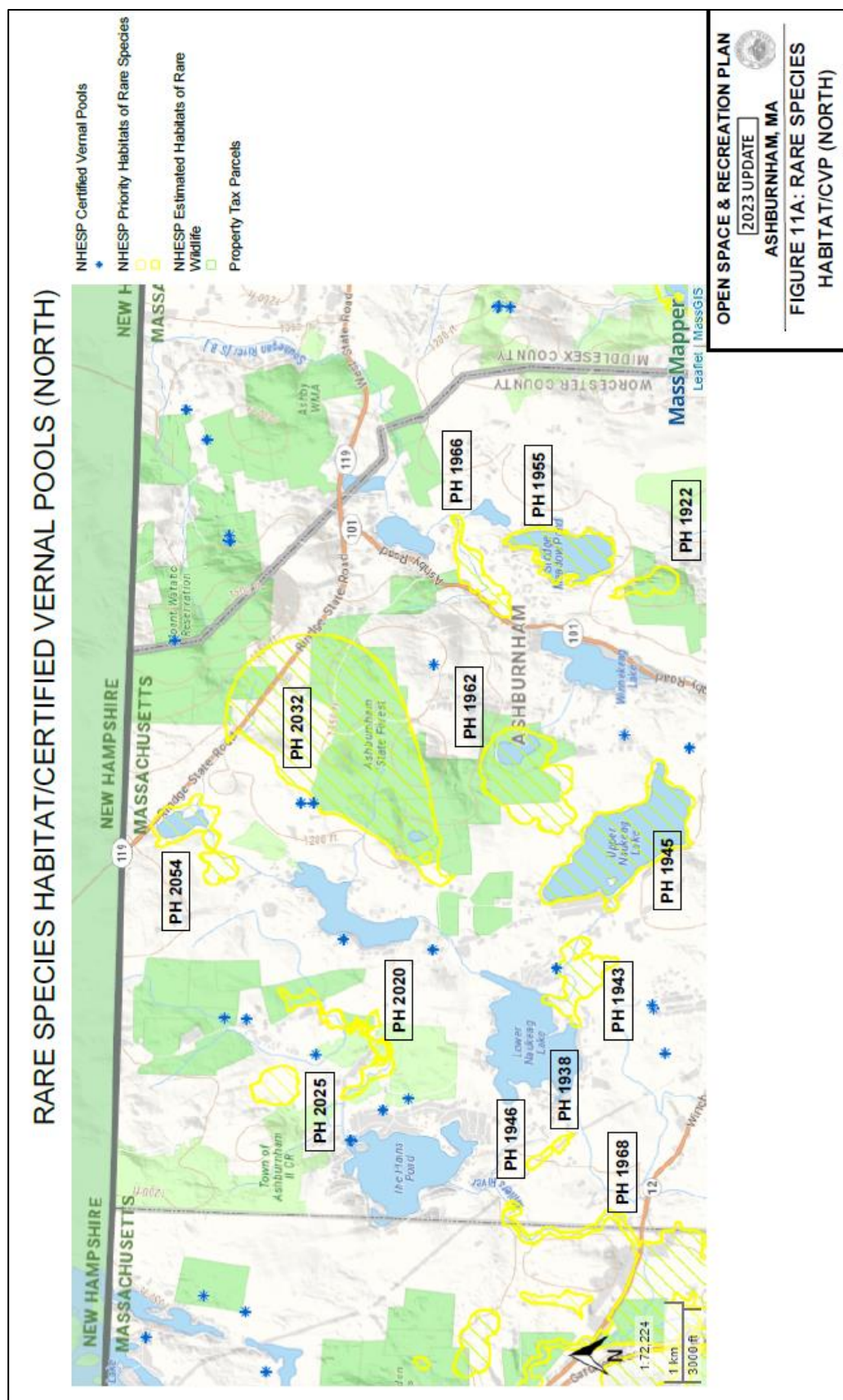


FIGURE 11A. STATE-DESIGNATED RARE SPECIES HABITAT (NORTH)

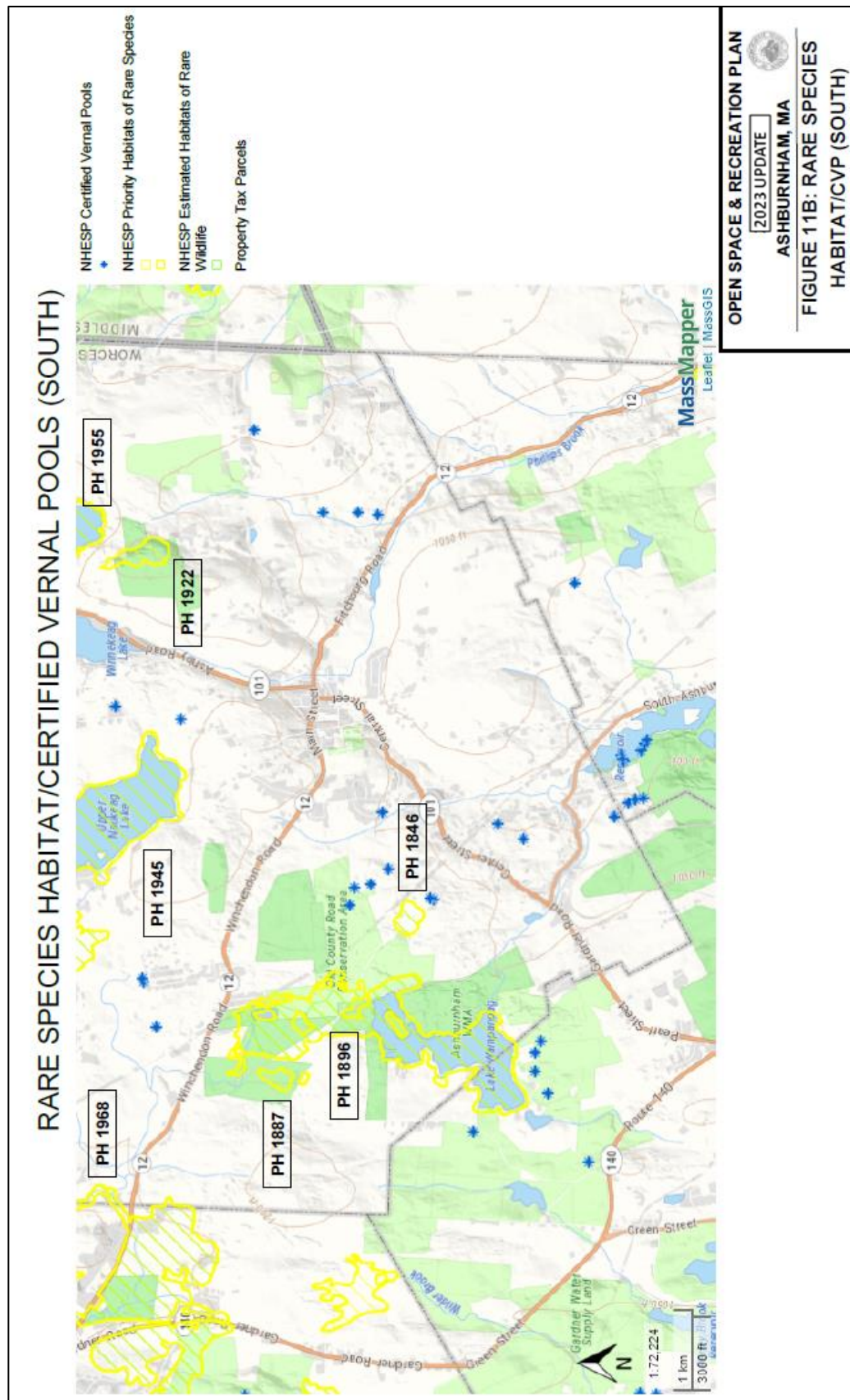


FIGURE 11B. STATE-DESIGNATED RARE SPECIES HABITAT (South)

F. Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

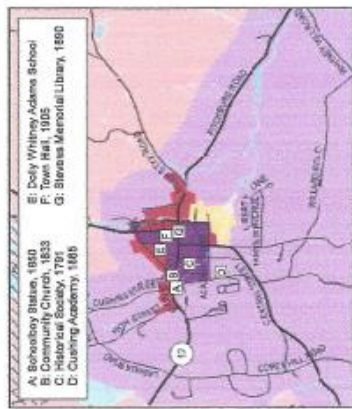
Scenic hilltops and historical places comprise many of the Town's scenic resources (see **Figure 12** and **Table D**). Often, the same scenic hilltops and historical places are also valued as wildlife habitat or recreational areas. As noted previously, there also are thirteen Scenic Roads within Ashburnham (see **Figure 13**).

Table D: Scenic and Unique Resource Locations and Values

Location	Value
Bush Hill	Special plant communities, scenic and recreational opportunities (see Mount Hunger)
Nutting Hill	Scenic views/hilltop
Mount Watatic	Rocky summit and scenic views from top, as well as hiking and bird watching
Fisher Hill	Scenic views/hilltop
Mount Hunger	Scenic views and recreational opportunities including hiking, joggings, cross country skiing, bird watching, and hunting
Meetinghouse Hill	Historic site with old cemetery and well house
Jewel Hill	Views of Mount Wachusett and Boston
Russell Hill Road and Cambridge Land Grant National Register Historic District	Views of Beaver Pond, Boston, Cambridge Grant Farm, and John Adams Homestead; Blueberry Farms
Historic District	Old homes, historic buildings and Schoolboy Statue
Packard Hill Road	Views of Mount Monadnock and Mount Watatic
Hastings Road	Location of quaking bog
Midstate Trail	Multi-state trail with numerous recreational opportunities. Scenic views from Mount Hunger and Mount Watatic
Route 101 to the Town Center	Lake Winnekeag, homes and summer camps
Route 101 to South Ashburnham	Remnants of old mills and associated housing
High Street and Lake Road	Scenic views of Upper Naukeag Lake and surrounding hills
State Forest Lands	Intact forest
Lakes and Lakeshores	Scenic water and forest views, special habitats including bogs and wetlands

Unique and Scenic Resources

When asked to describe Ashburnham, residents praise the quiet, peaceful atmosphere, the beautiful lakes and mountains, and the rich history and rural character. The unique and scenic resources of the town comprise both natural and man-made elements such as the historic Cambridge Grant area and the rugged beauty of Mount Watatic, Ashburnham's highest peak. The abundant water resources and forest cover set Ashburnham apart from many Massachusetts towns. Large parcels of unfragmented forest provide habitat for animals favored by wildlife viewers and hunters. Lakes and wetlands foster numerous species of insects, amphibians, birds, and mammals. The Midstate Trail and scenic roadways provide residents and visitors with beautiful views and recreational opportunities. The historic areas and village center provide a link to the past, when Ashburnham was a thriving chair-manufacturing town. Today the town draws summer residents, hikers, hunters, birders, boaters, and people who crave peace and quiet.



Ashburnham's Historic District and Significant Features

Legend

- Vernal Pool
- Historic Site
- Scenic Roads
- Midstate
- Perennial Stream
- Intermittent Stream
- Pond or Lake
- Reservoir
- Scenic Mountains and Hilltops
- BioMap2 Core Habitat
- BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscape

Source: MassGIS (2021)
 BioMap2 - Ashburnham (2012)
 Ashburnham Scenic Road Rules/Regulations
 (Revised 2006)

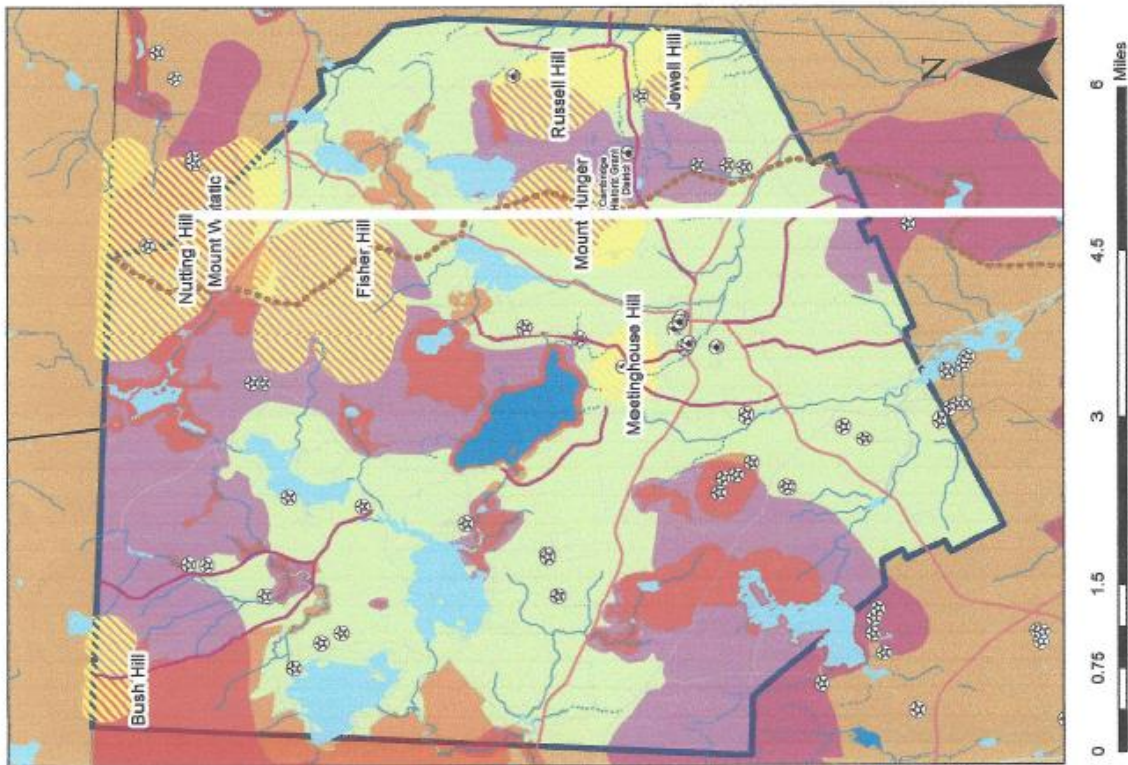


FIGURE 12. UNIQUES AND SCENIC RESOURCES

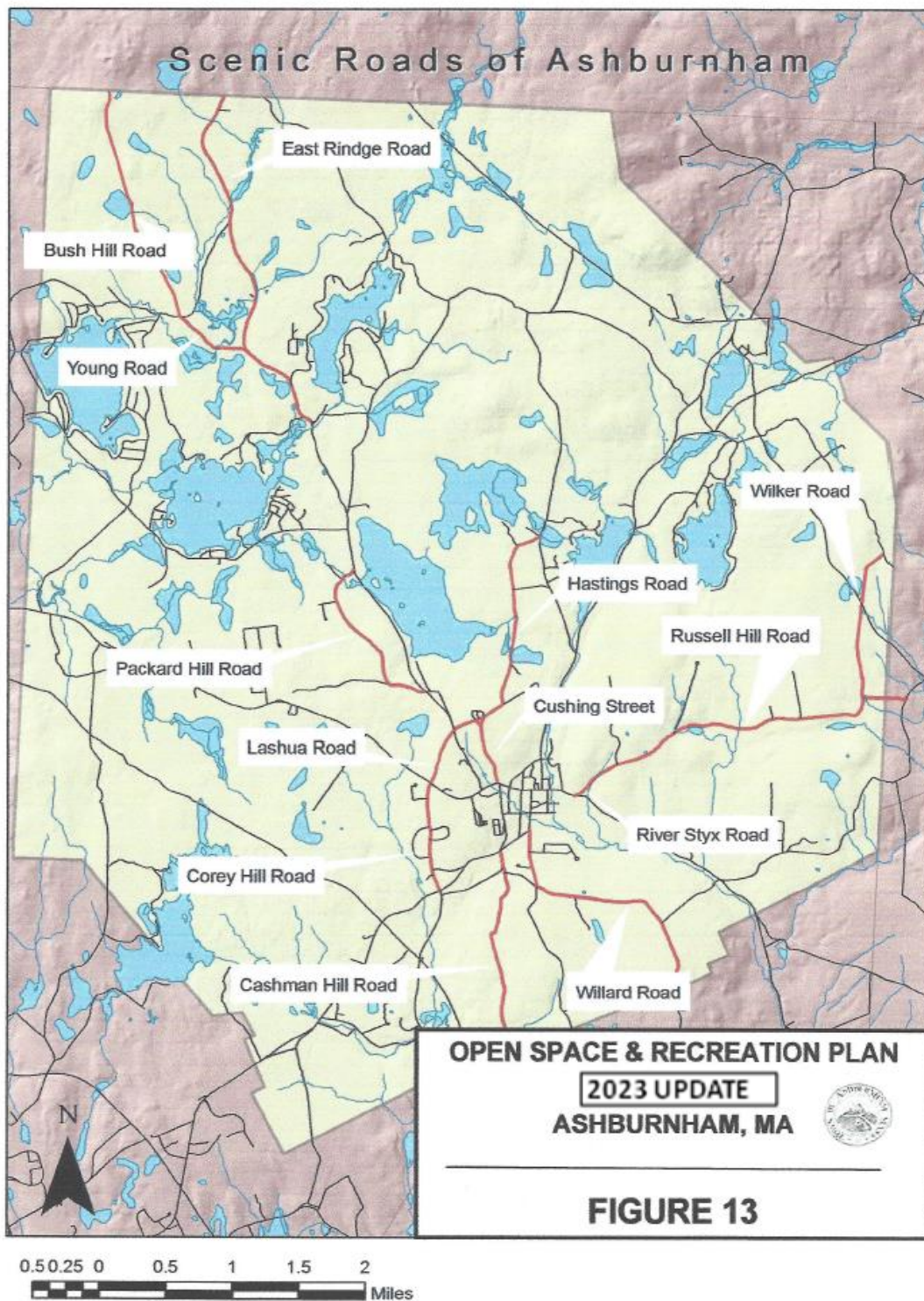


FIGURE 13. SCENIC ROADS

G. Environmental Challenges

Although Ashburnham's history created cultural and recreational resources that are valued today, many environmental problems are also associated with past and present land uses. Water quality is a major environmental challenge, as industrial processing materials are often not dealt with properly, leading to point source pollution. Additionally, non-point source pollution from failing septic systems continue to threaten Ashburnham's water bodies. Fortunately, the Town and individual property owners are taking steps to address these issues and prevent future problems.

New Development

As noted in Table A on Population Characteristics, Ashburnham has experienced much faster population growth than the state as a whole. Ashburnham lies just outside of the "sprawl frontier"³⁸ of rapid growth that has already surged through small towns northeast of Boston. Pressure for increased housing in rural towns was further increased with the Covid pandemic, as new residents sought to leave crowded cities, and as work shifted online.

A number of small residential developments have been built in Ashburnham over the past decade, mostly in those areas served by municipal sewer and water. Proposed future development outside of municipally served utility areas may be a challenge to the Town as it balances residential growth and municipal land use protection bylaws and regulations.

Another challenge is the practice of clearing new lots for development, followed by an abandoned project. While this is not common, several obvious lots around town have remained as eyesores for years after the forest was cleared.

Strategic conservation planning, permanent protection, and enforcing state and local regulations remain the important tools to protect the rural character of Ashburnham and to minimize the negative impacts of further growth.

Forest Cutting

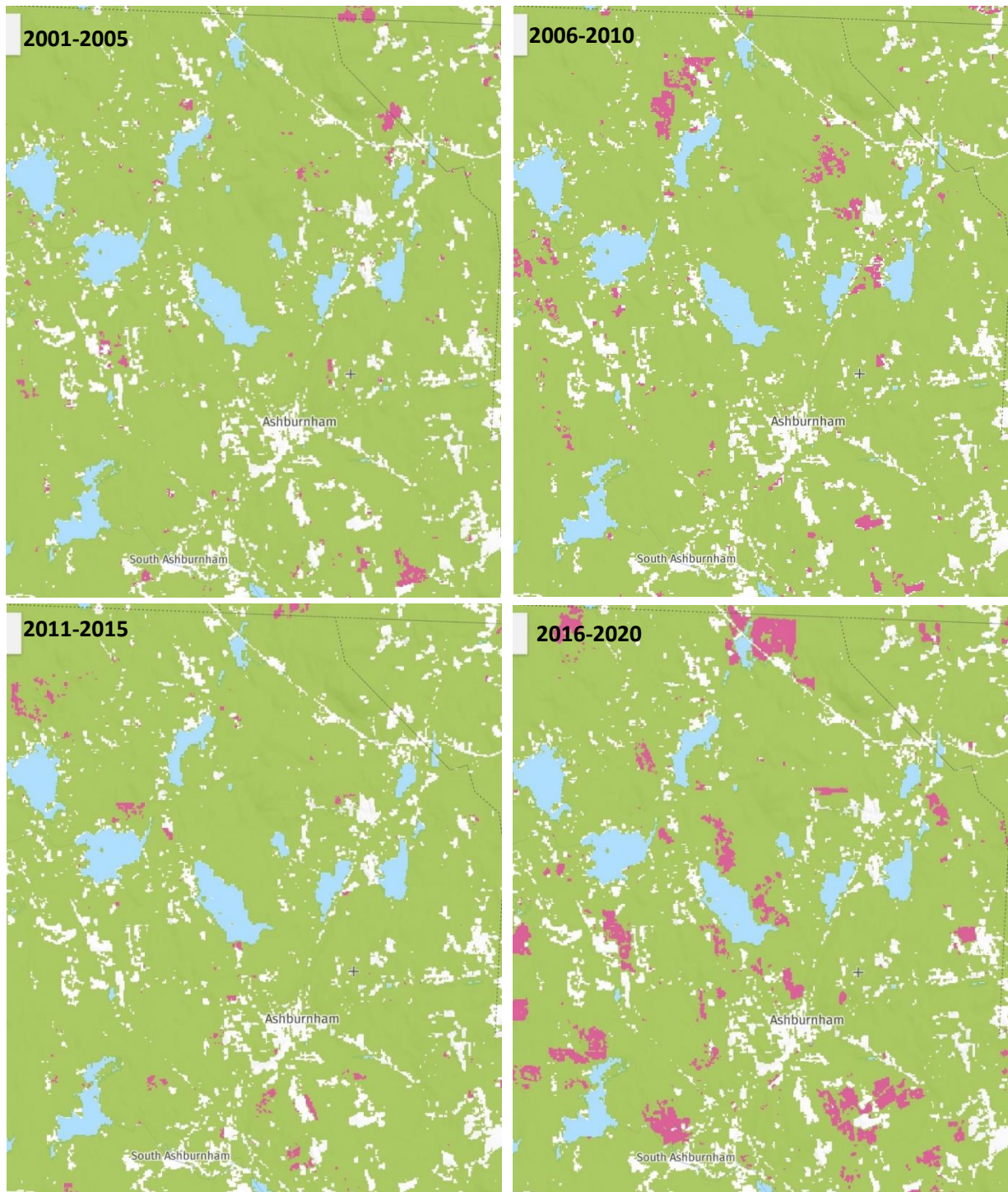
Ashburnham is blessed with abundant forest cover, and logging has been an important industry for centuries to provide lumber, firewood, and (more recently) biomass fuel. However, recent increases in forest cutting, along with permanent forest loss to development, are deeply concerning.

One of the important changes to Ashburnham is the increased rate of forest cutting seen since the prior OSRP was submitted. To document these changes, maps from the Global Forest Watch website, a site that creates maps of forest loss using satellite imagery, were reviewed and the resulting maps for the Ashburnham area are presented below (see **Exhibit I**).

³⁸ Losing Ground 2020. MA Audubon.

https://www.massaudubon.org/content/download/41477/1007612/file/Losing-Ground-VI_2020_final.pdf

Exhibit I: Forest Cutting in Ashburnham for recent 5-year intervals between 2001-2020.³⁹



Areas with forest cutting during each interval are shown in red. The maps are rectangular, so they include a small amount of forest cutting in adjacent towns.

³⁹ www.globalforestwatch.org/map/

With each map, “ImageJ”, a Java-based image processing and analysis program, was used to calculate the percent of total area with forest cutting (i.e., % of each map depicted in red) as shown in Table E, below.

Table E: Forest Losses in Ashburnham, 2001 – 2020

TIME INTERVAL	PERCENT OF FOREST LOSS
2001-2005	0.7
2006-2010	1.5
2011-2015	0.6
2016-2020	3.8

Based on these data, there’s reason for concern given the dramatic increase in forest cutting in the last 5 years. The average amount of cutting in the previous 5-year intervals was 0.9%, but the rate of forest cutting was 4 times faster from 2016-2020. From 2018-2020, the Town received 25 separate forest cutting plans that impacted a total of 856 acres. Many of these logged forests were harvested as part of a planned forestry management activity and will recover, but such a rapid loss of sequestered carbon is unfortunate at a time when societal carbon emissions must be reduced. Moreover, some of the logged areas include permanent development such as housing lots.

One instance of forest cutting from 2013-2014 was the installation of a 20-acre solar array on Murray Road. Solar PV arrays provide many environmental benefits, but alternatives to land-based arrays, such as large rooftops, parking lots, and brownfields should also be considered prior to permitting forest clearing for solar arrays.

Source Water Protection and Water Quality

Part of Ashburnham is served by municipal water obtained from Upper Naukeag Lake. The water quality is good, with water withdrawn from the lake being clarified and filtered at the Lake Street Water Treatment Plant, and chemicals added to aid in clarification, filtration, disinfection, and corrosion control.⁴⁰ From the treatment plant, water is pumped into 53 miles of water transmission mains and two water storage tanks (see **Appendix A, Figure A3**). In 2019, the plant produced an average of 245,000 gallons per day, with an annual total of 89.8 million gallons of water produced for Ashburnham residents. Overall, there are approximately 1,300 service connections to the water supply system and over 270 hydrants in Ashburnham.

Consistent with State regulations, lands within 400 feet of Upper Naukeag Lake constitute Zone A surface water supply protection areas. Lands within 200 feet of tributaries to the lake constitute Zone A areas, as well (see **Figure 14**).

⁴⁰ Town of Ashburnham. 2020. *2020 Water Quality Report*. Department of Public Works. Ashburnham, MA.

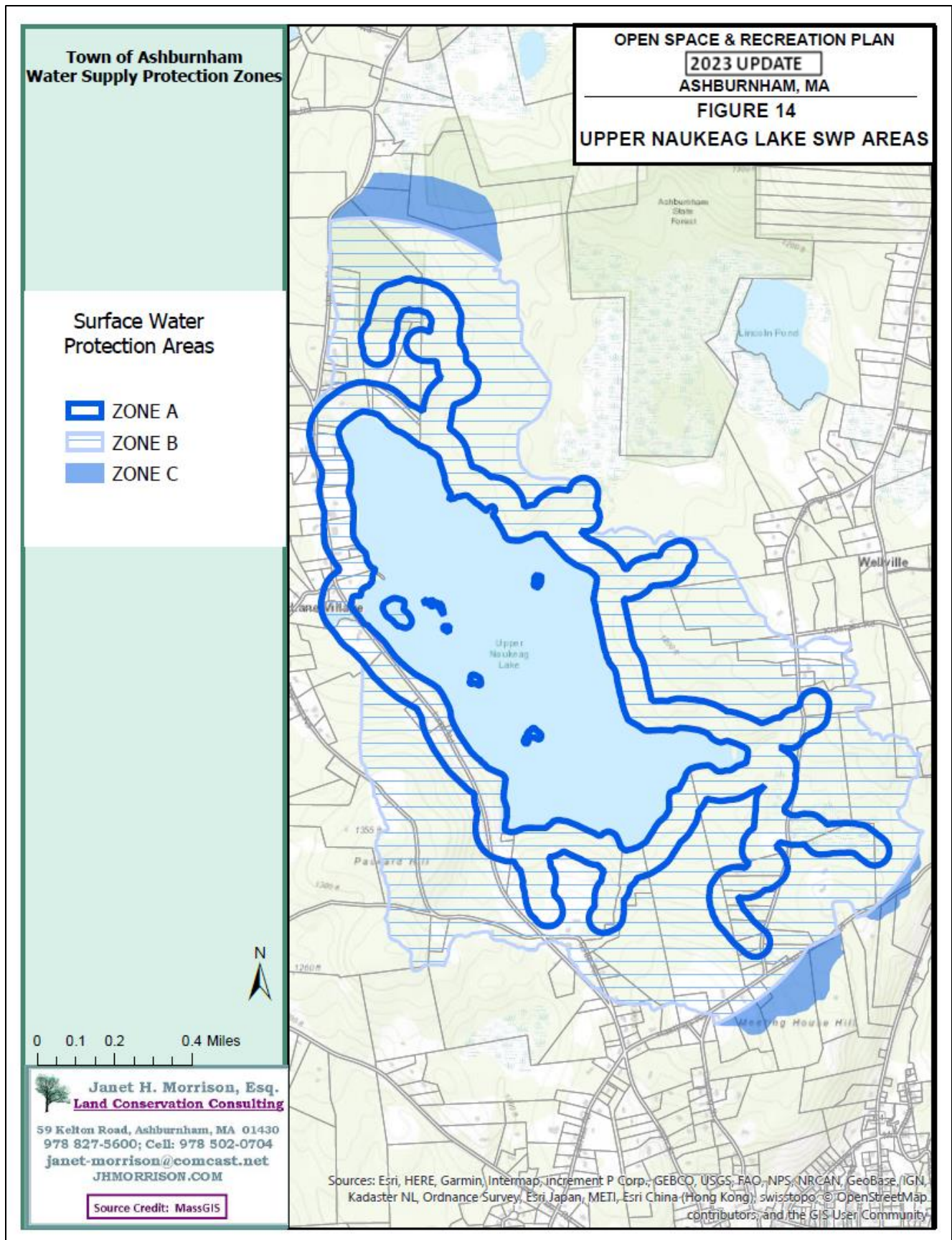
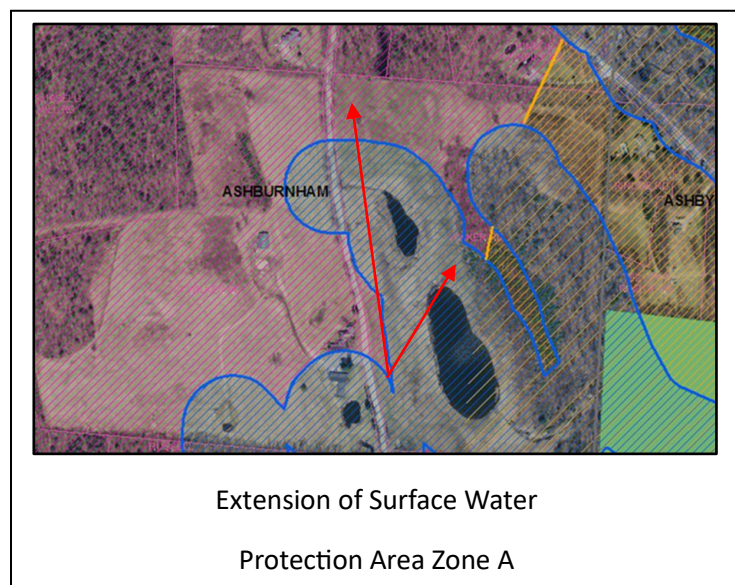


FIGURE 14. UPPER NAUKEAG LAKE (RESERVOIR) Zone A

Other Zone A waters/lands in Ashburnham are located in the eastern portion of the Town proximate to the Ashby border, and occur within the watershed of the Fitchburg Reservoir, a public water supply for the City of Fitchburg (see **Figure 15**). Although not yet shown on the MassGIS database, site-specific investigations conducted by MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)/Division of Water Supply staff resulted in the extension of Zone A to encompass the two ponds and tributary thereto east of Wilker Road. Surface water supply protection Zones B and C include the land within 0.5 miles of these water supplies, and all other lands within the watersheds, respectively.



In addition to MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations governing surface water supply protection, the Town is in the process of updating its bylaws relative to the Water Supply Protection Overlay District so that they comply with DEP regulations. While such regulatory controls do not prohibit development in Zones A-C, diligence by Town boards and commissions with respect to State/municipal development-related requirements in these zones is a prerequisite to maintaining the viability of public water supplies.

As noted earlier, individual facilities also have DEP-regulated Non-Community Groundwater Wells, including Camp Winnekeag, Camp Split Rock, Camp Wellville, Camp Collier, and the former Ashburnham Country Store on Route 119. Since the actual Zone II recharge areas for these wells has not been established, i.e., the extent of the aquifer deposits located within and upgradient from the production well's capture zone, DEP has assigned Interim Wellhead Protection Areas for each well which may range from 100-400 feet, depending upon the pumping rate (see **Figures 16** and **Appendix A, Figure A4**).

Sewage disposal systems have the potential to be the largest source of future groundwater contamination. A number of old dwellings clustered around many of the residential lakes use outdated methods of waste disposal, such as cesspools, outhouses, and buried drums. These sites are generally small and were unintended for year-round use. If these systems are compromised, they have the potential to affect water quality. Small lot sizes, poor soil conditions, and a high water table, all of which make installation of a standard sewage system difficult, limit renovations and conversion of seasonal dwellings to contemporary systems. In many instances, the only sewage-related solution is the installation of a tight tank.

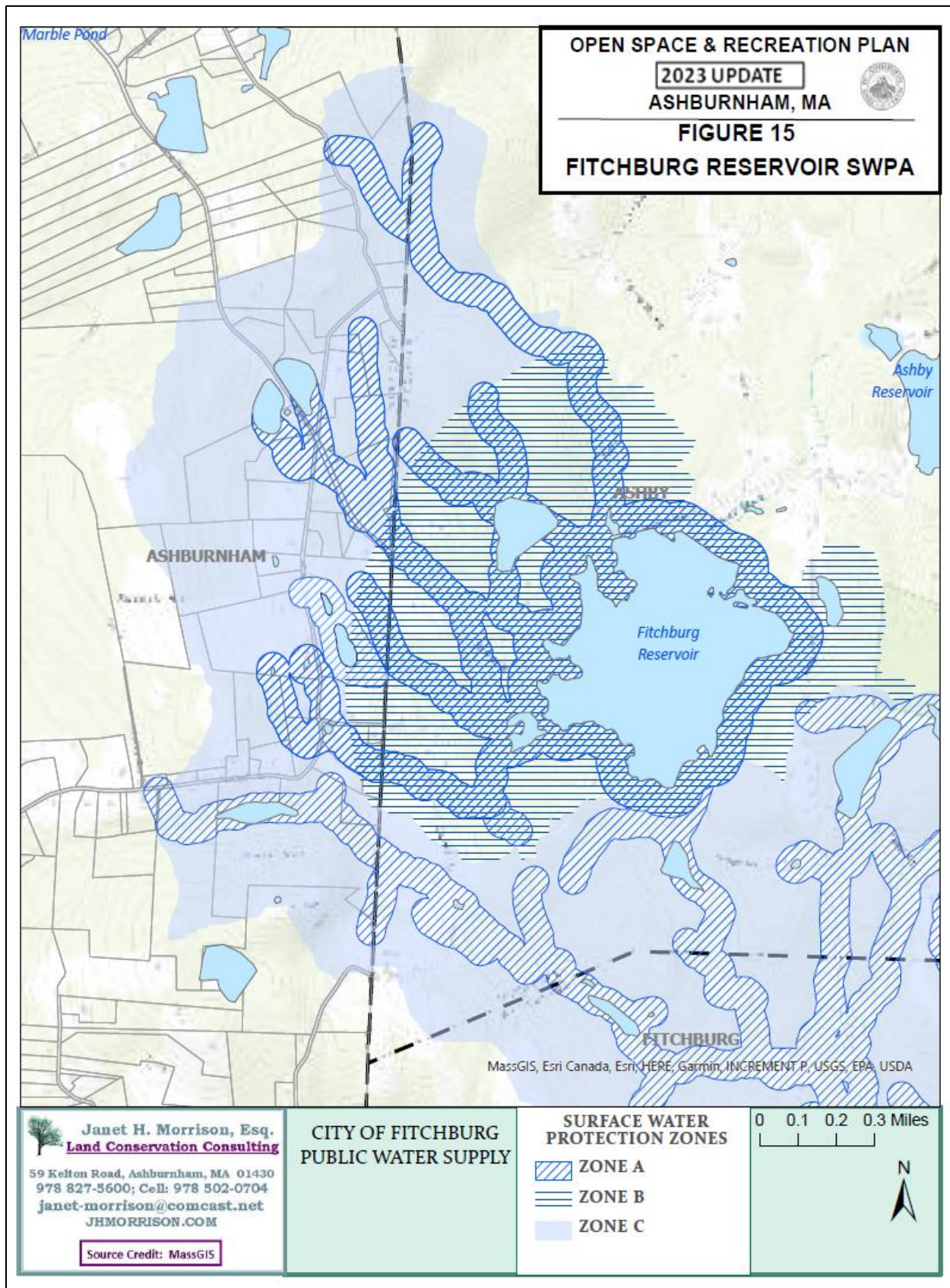


FIGURE 15. FITCHBURG RESERVOIR SURFACE WATER PROTECTION AREA

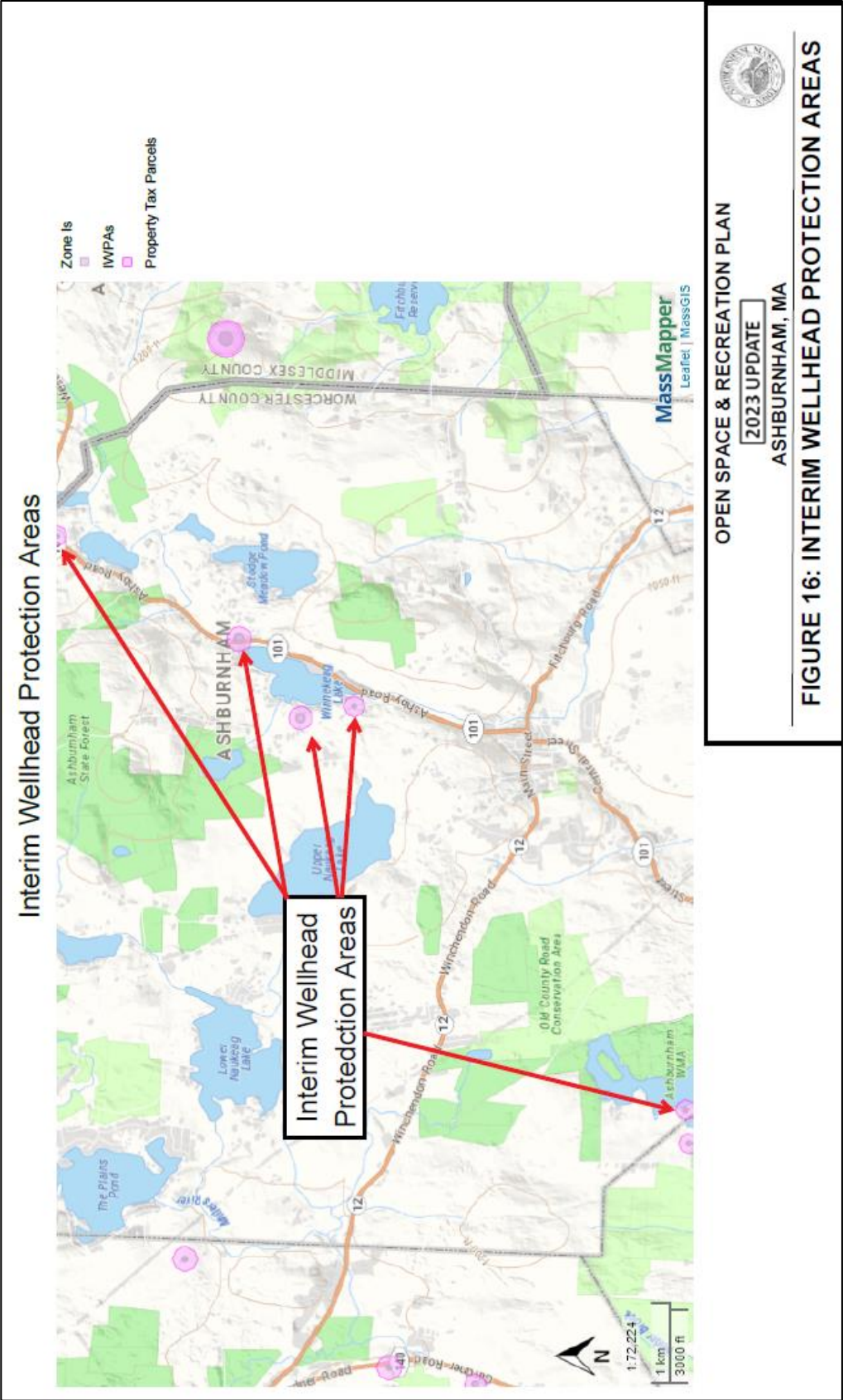


FIGURE 16 – INTERIM WELLHEAD PROTECTION AREAS

Erosion and Sedimentation

The control of erosion and sedimentation is an important goal of Town Departments, Boards and Commissions that oversee development. To this end, the requirement to implement and monitor such controls is an integral condition of all development-related permits collectively issued by the Town. The post-permit monitoring of construction sites also is key to reducing erosion/sedimentation, as is the commitment to mandate remedial actions during/following unexpected storm events that increase the potential for erosion/sedimentation. The need for such diligence was exemplified in 2014 when severe rains caused the erosion of several contiguous construction sites, the formation of a large sediment plume and sediment deposition in Lake Winnekeag, and sediment-related impacts to bordering vegetated wetlands (BVW). Through coordination with the Conservation Commission, as well as with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program, the landowner(s) stabilized the disturbed areas to preclude further erosion/sedimentation. The affected BVW was also restored.

The Low Impact Development (LID) Bylaw, passed in early 2008, also assists in preventing erosion and sediment-laden runoff associated with construction projects over 7,500 square feet. To utilize the LID Bylaw to its full potential, however, land use officials need to work together to monitor and enforce the LID Bylaw.

As a means of source prevention, street sweeping is critical to curtailing the sedimentation-related impacts of sanding operations conducted during the winter months for public safety purposes. In addition, unpaved roads around lakes and other surface waters have the potential to cause erosion and the sedimentation of key resource areas. Since lake associations lack the funds to engineer and monitor their roadways, the Town sometimes is pressured to maintain and repair privately owned roads. Nonexistent stormwater management systems and poorly managed private driveways further exacerbate the effects of erosion/sedimentation.

Chronic Flooding

Flooding due to storm events is not common in Ashburnham, although the town has had to contend with numerous, costly, and chronic flooding problems caused by beavers damming sections of streams and outlets to/from wetland areas. This problem will need to be monitored closely since, as recently has been demonstrated, damming has the potential to affect the sewage disposal systems and wells of property owners adjacent to the flooded areas.

Control devices, such as beaver deceivers, should be encouraged, as they have been effective in most cases, preventing costly, repetitive trapping and constant culvert maintenance clearing debris.

Hazardous Waste

Since the previous OSRP Update, only one oil/hazardous materials (OHM) event has occurred in Ashburnham. At a residence proximate to Billy Ward Pond, environmental remediation activities were conducted in 2020 relative to a release of #2 fuel oil from an abandoned 275-gallon steel aboveground storage tank (AST). The released petroleum traveled over the ground surface

towards an adjacent wetland and neighboring property, causing an oily sheen on the water surface of the wetland. Remediation activities were conducted as an Immediate Response Action (IRA) to address petroleum-impacted soil and groundwater in accordance with MCP 310 CMR 40, Section 40.0410. Continued IRA activities included remedial soil excavation of approximately 300 cubic yards in the petroleum-impacted area. After the excavation work, the area was backfilled with clean fill, similar to the material that was removed, and wetland restoration efforts were subsequently implemented.

There also has been concern that waste from demolition of an old factory may have contaminated Whitney Pond in South Ashburnham, which formerly was of interest as a potential site for public swimming access. However, all issues in this regard, including pond substrate management, have been addressed in conjunction with the Town's preparation of a Single Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) pursuant to the MA Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and associated permitting at the Federal, State, and municipal levels relative to the potential removal of the dam.⁴¹

Other potential sources of hazardous materials contamination may be the indiscriminate dumping of household wastes down the drains of dwellings serviced by on-site sewage disposal systems. Conducting household hazardous waste collection days, if implemented, would minimize the improper disposal of hazardous materials by residents (See Section Nine: Seven-Year Action Plan).

Landfill

The Town has closed its landfills on Winchendon Road and Williams Road. The closures were done in compliance with the MA Department of Environmental Protection regulations and approval. Rubbish is now collected at the former landfill on Winchendon Road and disposed of outside of the town. A transfer and recycling center has been located at this location and the Williams Road site has been converted into a recreational facility known as Landry Field. No known environmental challenges exist with respect to either of these areas.

Invasive Species

Invasive species and introduced diseases that affect local forests are a key forest management issue. Major concerns in Ashburnham are the hemlock wooly adelgid; the Asian long-horned beetle which affects maples, horse chestnuts, birches, poplars, willows, elms, and others; and the emerald ash borer, which affects white, black, red, and green ash. The Asian long-horned beetle has been in the Worcester area since 2008. Invasive plant species associated with uplands, such as glossy buckthorn, multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet, and Japanese knotweed also are an issue, as are purple loosestrife, common reed and Eurasian milfoil in wetland/aquatic environments. The perennial application of herbicides to many of Ashburnham's lakes is testament to the ongoing issues relative to the control of invasive and nuisance aquatic vegetation.

Currently, the spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*), a sap-feeding member of the Order Hemiptera (true bugs, cicadas, hoppers, aphids, and others) and the Family Fulgoridae, also known

⁴¹ Pare Corporation. February 2021. *Single Environmental Impact Report: Whitney Pond Dam Removal - Ashburnham, Massachusetts*. EEA File Number 16233. Prepared for the Town of Ashburnham. Ashburnham, MA.

as plant hoppers, threatens multiple groundcover, fruit, shrub and tree species. This non-native Asian (i.e., China, India and Vietnam) species was first detected in the United States in Berks County, Pennsylvania and confirmed on September 22, 2014. In 2021, a breeding population was detected in Fitchburg, and has also been observed in Leominster.

Livestock

The Town has experienced a handful of complaints regarding the keeping of cattle and horses. The Board of Health has established Stable Regulations to minimize the problems associated with odor and flies. Continued education of and responsible actions by livestock owners hopefully will temper future problems. Several farms with livestock are located adjacent to wetland areas, creating the potential that farm pollution that will make its way into the Town's water resources. To protect water quality, the formulation of a manure management plan has been required by the Conservation Commission, where applicable, along with compliance with all pertinent regulations and best management practices.

Environmental Equity

Environmental equity refers to the distribution of open space and recreation resources, and the identification of geographic areas and members of the population, if any, that are lacking in such resources.

As evidenced by the Formal Trail Inventory map in Section 3, as well as the map of Protected Open Space in Section 5, public open space both with and without trail systems occurs throughout the Town, with playgrounds concentrated in more densely developed areas, i.e., Ashburnham Center and South Ashburnham. The vast majority of these public open spaces are easily accessible, and many are linked with designated open space in the adjoining communities of Ashby, Westminster, Gardner, and Winchendon.

While well represented in the community, surveys of residents indicate that some open space/recreation opportunities still are lacking (see Section 6). As a result, these needs will be factored into future planning endeavors.

Ashburnham is fortunate to have an abundance of wetlands scattered throughout the Town that help maintain water quality and provide habitat for a diverse assemblage and abundance of wildlife species.

SECTION 5



Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest



Section 5. Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

The Town of Ashburnham defines open space as any undeveloped land that may have a conservation or recreational interest, including, but not limited to, forested lands, historic districts, farms, lakes, and wetlands. Ashburnham prides itself on its rural character and in the future may rely on this for recreation-based development. Residents are interested in conserving and protecting the natural environment of Ashburnham for the good of the community, wildlife, and water quality. Town residents understand that the conservation of critical natural and water resources, expansion and improvement of conservation land and protection of habitat are necessary to sustain their quality of life. Due to the risk of development pressure, the Town's natural assets and its unique scenic landscape should be inventoried and prioritized based on their environmental, ecological, and recreational values and benefits so that sensitive, unique, or generally important resources can be preserved for continued community benefit through the purchase and protection of land or other suitable means of open space protection. Section Five provides an inventory of public and private parcels designated as open space and their respective protection status, focusing on areas of conservation and recreation interest.

Ashburnham has approximately 8,636 acres of open space land protected in perpetuity, including privately owned lands protected under a Conservation Restriction (CR) or Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). That accounts for roughly thirty-three percent of the town's total acreage (26,209 Acres), with the majority of protected open space being publicly owned. About 1,000 acres of open space lands have been protected in Ashburnham since 2019. However, the Town also has an abundance of open space that is not protected in perpetuity and, therefore, is susceptible to development. Permanently protected (protected in perpetuity by deed, easement, and/or Town meeting vote) Town-owned conservation land totals approximately 900 acres. Additionally, approximately 3,597 acres of open space are owned and protected by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' agencies, including the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, and MA Department of Fish and Game. Most of this open space land is located in the Ashburnham State Forest and is dedicated to conservation and recreation uses.

A summary of each of these types open space lands is provided in **Table F** (Chapter 61 Lands), **Table G** (Governmental, Conservation Organizations/Land Trusts, Non-CR Agricultural Preservation Restriction, and Conservation Restriction Lands), and **Table H** (Town-Owned Conservation/Recreation Lands). All lands listed within **Table F**, **Table G**, and **Table H** are shown on the map of Ashburnham's Protected Open Space, or Open Space Inventory, provided in **Appendix A** of this Plan.

TABLE F. Chapter 61 Program Lands

Chapter ID	Owner1	Owner2	Parcel ID	Classification	Correct Classification	One Classification	Property Address	Total Acres	61Acres	61A Acres	61B Acres	Total Chapter Acres
1			38_10	61		61	JEWELL HILL RD	10.00	4.35	5.65	0.00	10.00
70			38_9	61, 61A		61	JEWELL HILL RD	96.00	86.05	9.97	0.00	96.00
80			39_34	61, 61B	61	61	RUSSELL HILL RD	35.75	34.57	0.00	1.38	35.75
71			16_12	61, 61A		61	OLD COUNTY RD	25.85	23.62	1.38	0.00	25.00
72			20_12B	61, 61A		61	OLD COUNTY RD	35.27	23.62	11.65	0.00	35.27
28			22_43	61		61	40 MARSHALL MILLS RD	9.60	7.60	0.00	0.00	7.60
74			35_43	61, 61A	61	61	MARSHALL MILLS RD	11.79	10.41	1.38	0.00	11.79
83			40_19	61, 61B	61	61	RINDGE TURNPIKE	17.39	16.02	0.00	1.38	17.39
85			13_9	61, 61B		61	HEALD RD	48.94	24.47	0.00	24.47	48.94
68			30_7	61		61	115 RINDGE STATE RD	12.15	10.77	0.00	0.00	10.77
58			22_29B	61		61	MARSHALL MILLS RD	21.00	21.00	0.00	0.00	21.00
39			35_22	61		61	44 CROSBY RD	38.85	35.74	0.00	0.00	35.74
40			35_16	61		61	FITCHBURG RD	8.30	0.00	0.00	8.30	8.30
41			35_22	61		61	FITCHBURG RD	75.40	75.40	0.00	0.00	75.40
42			7_21	61		61	BUSH HILL RD	20.14	20.14	0.00	0.00	20.14
43			10_2	61		61	23 EAST RINDGE RD	57.70	55.70	0.00	0.00	55.70
44			10_3	61		61	EAST RINDGE RD	14.40	14.40	0.00	0.00	14.40
45			41_9	61		61	35 BYFIELD RD	70.00	64.80	0.00	0.00	64.80
46			14_9	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	366.50	366.50	0.00	0.00	366.50
47			4_28	61		61	DEPOT RD	12.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	12.00
48			4_30	61		61	NAUKEAG TRACT+44	148.00	148.00	0.00	0.00	148.00
49			5_2	61		61	SHERBERT RD	195.00	195.00	0.00	0.00	195.00
50			32_21	61		61	26 LOG CABIN RD	69.38	68.00	0.00	0.00	68.00
2			33_25B	61		61	60 RUSSELL HILL RD	16.99	13.99	0.00	0.00	13.99
51			35_1	61		61	228 WILLARD RD	79.00	51.87	0.00	0.00	51.87
3			12_16	61		61	BACHMANN RD	120.10	118.60	0.00	0.00	118.60
4			6_7	61		61	PERIN RD	65.00	65.00	0.00	0.00	65.00
5			14_10	61		61	COUGHLIN RD	36.50	36.50	0.00	0.00	36.50
6			2_27	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	404.00	404.00	0.00	0.00	404.00
7			9_1	61		61	OLD GARDNER RD	113.00	113.00	0.00	0.00	113.00
52			32_28	61		61	248 STOWELL RD	38.55	35.60	0.00	0.00	35.60
8			21_155	61		61	28 COREY HILL RD	50.00	48.97	0.00	0.00	48.97
10			35_25	61		61	RUSSELL HILL RD	60.72	58.59	0.00	0.00	58.59
11			31_1	61		61	209 STOWELL RD	9.01	7.62	0.00	0.00	7.62
12			32_1A	61		61	STOWELL RD	10.80	10.80	0.00	0.00	10.80
13			21_156	61		61	16 LILLIAN DR	23.02	21.63	0.00	0.00	21.63
14			40_7	61		61	93 RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	207.60	187.90	0.00	0.00	187.90
15			9_13	61		61	161 PERIN ROAD	213.00	211.00	0.00	0.00	211.00
16			26_6	61		61	289 RINDGE STATE RD	554.00	489.10	0.00	0.00	489.10
17			27_5	61		61	RINDGE STATE RD	329.10	308.20	0.00	0.00	308.20
18			39_11A	61		61	RUSSELL HILL RD	14.40	14.40	0.00	0.00	14.40
19			41_11A	61		61	BYFIELD RD	10.57	10.57	0.00	0.00	10.57
20			16_16	61		61	OLD COUNTY RD	9.00	9.00	0.00	0.00	9.00
21			16_17	61		61	OLD COUNTY RD	9.50	9.50	0.00	0.00	9.50
22			16_19	61		61	OLD COUNTY RD	21.08	21.08	0.00	0.00	21.08
23			16_20A	61		61	OLD COUNTY RD	17.99	14.99	0.00	0.00	14.99
53			16_18	61		61	73 OLD COUNTY RD	15.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	12.00
24			43_4	61		61	70 RINDGE STATE RD	19.00	15.00	0.00	0.00	15.00
54			10_14	61		61	RINDGE RD	55.00	55.00	0.00	0.00	55.00
55			13_40B	61		61	LAKE RD	94.60	90.60	0.00	0.00	90.60
56			14_20	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	89.30	89.30	0.00	0.00	89.30
57			14_21	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	18.40	18.40	0.00	0.00	18.40
58			14_23	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	33.46	33.46	0.00	0.00	33.46
59			16_15A	61		61	EATON RD	67.00	67.00	0.00	0.00	67.00
60			20_44	61		61	CASHMAN HILL RD	85.20	85.20	0.00	0.00	85.20
61			23_2	61		61	LAKE RD	5.50	5.50	0.00	0.00	5.50
62			24_2	61		61	HARRIS RD	483.60	483.60	0.00	0.00	483.60
63			3_10	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	24.25	24.25	0.00	0.00	24.25
64			3_10A	61		61	WINCHENDON RD	12.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	12.00
65			33_6	61		61	KELTON RD	32.00	32.00	0.00	0.00	32.00
66			34_51	61		61	MAIN ST	80.00	80.00	0.00	0.00	80.00
67			4_50	61		61	OFF WINCHENDON RD	19.50	19.50	0.00	0.00	19.50
26			8_10	61		61	PERIN RD	17.00	13.00	0.00	0.00	13.00
27			6_8	61		61	130 TUCKERMAN RD	30.75	26.59	0.00	0.00	26.59
29			7_19	61		61	BUSH HILL RD	39.50	39.50	0.00	0.00	39.50
30			7_5	61		61	HOLT ROAD	71.70	70.32	0.00	0.00	70.32
9			35_13	61		61	171 WILLARD RD	84.42	79.69	0.00	0.00	79.69
31			34_1	61		61	RIVER STYK RD	31.00	31.00	0.00	0.00	31.00
32			6_10	61		61	BUSH HILL RD	43.20	43.20	0.00	0.00	43.20
33			6_9	61		61	BUSH HILL RD	67.99	67.99	0.00	0.00	67.99
34			6_9A	61		61	BUSH HILL RD	13.42	13.42	0.00	0.00	13.42
35			54_3	61		61	9 HEATHER DUNN DR	11.00	9.81	0.00	0.00	9.81

TABLE F. Chapter 61 Program Lands (Continued)

86		42_14	61		61	MARBLE RD	48.36	48.36	0.00	0.00	48.36
87		42_15	61		61	RINDGE & BYFIELDS RDS	17.66	17.66	0.00	0.00	17.66
107		18_5	61A		61A	GARDNER RD	22.43	0.00	22.43	0.00	22.43
88		38_9	61A		61A	JEWELL HILL RD	96.00	86.03	9.97	0.00	96.00
89		39_19	61A		61A	JEWELL HILL RD	5.30	0.00	5.30	0.00	5.30
89		38_10	61, 61A		61A	JEWELL HILL RD	10.00	4.35	5.65	0.00	10.00
90		39_4	61A		61A	RUSSELL HILL RD	49.00	0.00	49.00	0.00	49.00
106		15_47	61A		61A	171 PACKARD HILL RD	36.40	0.00	35.02	0.00	35.02
108		36_1	61A, 61B		61A	50 WOODS RD	117.00	0.00	66.50	49.12	115.62
91		43_8	61A		61A	66 HARDY RD	9.00	0.00	7.62	0.00	7.62
109		43_7	61A, 61B		61A	HARDY RD	109.00	0.00	94.52	13.10	107.62
105		15_73	61A		61A	HEALD RD	14.00	0.00	14.00	0.00	14.00
25		35_3	61	61A	61A	WILLARD RD	20.88	20.88	0.00	0.00	20.88
92		35_3A	61A		61A	WILLARD RD	1.04	0.00	1.04	0.00	1.04
93		26_4	61A		61A	122 FERIN RD	19.60	0.00	14.10	0.00	14.10
73		20_12D	61, 61A		61A	OLD COUNTY ROAD	12.50	1.38	11.12	0.00	12.50
94		50_2	61A		61A	234 SHERBERT RD	18.62	0.00	17.24	0.00	17.24
110		22_1A	61A, 61B	61A	61A	39 LASHUA RD	32.47	0.00	26.35	4.77	31.12
75		21_47B	61, 61A		61A	LASHUA RD	11.10	0.00	11.10	0.00	11.10
76		14_8B	61, 61A		61A	WINCHENDON RD	17.02	8.62	7.01	0.00	15.63
95		14_8	61A		61A	296 WINCHENDON RD	6.96	0.00	5.58	0.00	5.58
96		32_11	61A		61A	154 ASHBY RD	23.94	0.00	20.71	0.00	20.71
77		41_17	61, 61A		61A	41 MARBLE ROAD	112.17	71.69	32.15	0.00	103.84
78		41_6	61, 61A		61A	41 MARBLE RD	36.28	11.93	12.67	0.00	24.60
79		35_14	61, 61A		61A	RUSSELL HILL RD	2.00	1.38	0.62	0.00	2.00
97		34_10	61A		61A	RUSSELL HILL RD	30.00	0.00	30.00	0.00	30.00
98		34_11	61A		61A	39 RUSSELL HILL RD	6.00	0.00	4.62	0.00	4.62
99		34_9	61A		61A	RUSSELL HILL RD	2.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
100		31_1E	61A		61A	235 STONELL RD	10.75	0.00	8.70	0.00	8.70
101		39_2	61A		61A	195 RUSSELL HILL RD	10.95	0.00	9.57	0.00	9.57
102		35_4	61A		61A	WILLARD RD	47.02	0.00	47.02	0.00	47.02
103		31_16	61A		61A	327 ASHBY RD	130.33	0.00	129.50	0.00	129.50
104		31_21	61A		61A	ASHBY RD	20.51	0.00	20.51	0.00	20.51
115		15_40	61B		61B	177 LAKE RD	15.40	0.00	0.00	14.00	14.00
165		25_11	61B		61B	HARRIS RD	3.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	3.00
116		37_5	61B		61B	JEWELL HILL RD	16.41	0.00	0.00	16.41	16.41
117		26_1C	61B		61B	9 FERIN RD	7.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	7.00
118		42_7	61B		61B	OLD ASHBY RD	14.00	0.00	0.00	14.00	14.00
166		15_17	61B		61B	225 LAKE RD	12.00	0.00	0.00	10.62	10.62
119		35_15	61B		61B	245 WILLARD RD	60.00	0.00	0.00	58.62	58.62
120		42_2F	61B		61B	427 ASHBY RD	13.14	0.00	0.00	11.76	11.76
121		54_4	61B		61B	21 HEATHER DUNN DR	18.00	0.00	0.00	13.00	13.00
122		5_586	61B		61B	SHERBERT RD	42.40	0.00	0.00	42.40	42.40
123		3_15	61B		61B	OLD GARDNER RD	12.70	0.00	0.00	12.70	12.70
124		38_3	61B		61B	GIBSON RD	11.30	0.00	0.00	11.20	11.20
125		39_21	61B		61B	RUSSELL HILL RD	6.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	6.00
167		24_1	61B		61B	2 LANE LANE	17.30	0.00	0.00	15.72	15.72
169		40_8A	61B		61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	5.10	0.00	0.00	5.10	5.10
170		40_8B	61B		61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	4.60	0.00	0.00	4.60	4.60
171		40_8C	61B		61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	5.10	0.00	0.00	5.10	5.10
172		40_8D	61B		61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	2.34	0.00	0.00	2.34	2.34
173		40_8E	61B		61B	233 RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	24.00	0.00	0.00	22.62	22.62
174		40_8F	61B		61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	13.80	0.00	0.00	13.80	13.80
126		19_17	61B		61B	108 WILLIAMS RD	13.35	0.00	0.00	11.97	11.97
127		56_10	61B		61B	LAKE SHORE DR	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.41
128		39_11	61B		61B	247 RUSSELL HILL RD	9.00	0.00	0.00	9.62	9.62
129		40_1	61B		61B	STODGE MEADOW RD	24.00	0.00	0.00	24.00	24.00
130		25_3	61B		61B	HARRIS RD	42.90	0.00	0.00	42.90	42.90
81		40_8G	61, 61B	61B	61B	RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	14.47	1.38	0.00	13.09	14.47
131		42_4	61B		61B	326 RINDGE TURNPIKE RD	22.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	20.00
152		39_2C	61B		61B	179 RUSSELL HILL RD	9.25	0.00	0.00	7.87	7.87
133		43_1	61B		61B	102 RINDGE STATE RD	16.50	0.00	0.00	14.92	14.92
82		38_2A	61, 61B	61B	61B	GIBSON RD	41.75	1.38	0.00	40.17	41.75
168		39_22	61B		61B	220 RUSSELL HILL RD	51.13	0.00	0.00	49.75	49.75
134		35_2	61B		61B	WILLARD RD	33.53	0.00	0.00	33.53	33.53
84		6_9B	61, 61B	61B	61B	BUSH HILL RD	9.60	1.38	0.00	8.22	9.60
135		38_2	61B		61B	100 GIBSON RD	30.32	0.00	0.00	18.14	18.14
112		20_33	61A, 61B		61B	60 WILLARD RD	248.35	0.00	75.80	171.17	246.97
136		14_19A	61B		61B	130 WINCHENDON RD	25.54	0.00	0.00	24.16	24.16
137		9_6D	61B		61B	260 EAST RINDGE RD	15.19	0.00	0.00	12.81	12.81
138		8_9D	61B		61B	FERIN RD	28.60	0.00	0.00	28.60	28.60
139		54_1	61B		61B	LOWER NAUKEAG	14.00	0.00	0.00	14.00	14.00
140		49_6	61B		61B	DUNN RD	24.00	0.00	0.00	24.00	24.00
141		20_25	61B		61B	94 COREY HILL RD	23.00	0.00	0.00	23.62	23.62
142		14_16	61B		61B	197 WINCHENDON RD	31.90	0.00	0.00	30.52	30.52

TABLE F. Chapter 61 Program Lands (Continued)

143		10_17	61B		61B	DUNN & YOUNG RD	165.75	0.00	0.00	165.75	165.75
144		15_10	61B		61B	18 HEALD RD	12.60	0.00	0.00	8.90	8.90
145		15_7&8	61B		61B	HEALD RD	116.57	0.00	0.00	116.57	116.57
146		15_74	61B		61B	HEALD RD	8.58	0.00	0.00	8.58	8.58
147		41_35	61B		61B	HOLT ROAD	6.92	0.00	0.00	6.92	6.92
148		65_15	61B		61B	ASHBY RD	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.09
149		39_20	61B		61B	RUSSELL HILL RD	51.90	0.00	0.00	51.90	51.90
86		34_43	61, 61B	61	61B	FITCHBURG RD	45.00	43.62	0.00	1.38	45.00
150		23_8	61B		61B	183 HASTINGS RD	30.00	0.00	0.00	25.50	25.50
87		27_1	61, 61B	61B	61B	FERN RD	155.00	1.38	0.00	155.62	155.00
151		27_2	61B		61B	7 STEARNS RD	35.50	0.00	0.00	35.12	35.12
152		6_8A	61B		61B	118 TUCKERMAN RD	27.00	0.00	0.00	21.00	21.00
153		32_22	61B		61B	HUNT RD	40.00	0.00	0.00	40.00	40.00
154		32_25	61B		61B	STODGE MEADOW RD	3.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	3.00
155		35_18G	61B		61B	77 CROSBY RD	32.35	0.00	0.00	32.35	32.35
113		25_19A	61A, 61B	61B	61B	18 KRAETZER RD	10.36	0.00	3.00	5.00	8.00
156		31_1C	61B		61B	STOWELL RD	10.90	0.00	0.00	10.90	10.90
157		35_5	61B		61B	100 WILLARD RD	86.40	0.00	0.00	73.10	73.10
158		34_43A	61B		61B	52 FITCHBURG RD	114.67	0.00	0.00	98.00	98.00
159		39_26	61B		61B	152 RUSSELL HILL RD	2.80	0.00	0.00	2.80	2.80
160		39_27	61B		61B	RUSSELL HILL RD	2.37	0.00	0.00	2.37	2.37
161		39_28	61B		61B	RUSSELL HILL RD	31.05	0.00	0.00	31.05	31.05
114		37_9	61A, 61B		61B	106 JEWELL HILL RD	58.00	0.00	16.00	40.62	56.62
162		2_6	61B		61B	254 OLD COUNTY RD	30.00	0.00	0.00	28.62	28.62
163		9_6F	61B		61B	224 EAST RINDGE RD	9.32	0.00	0.00	7.94	7.94
164		54_8	61B		61B	80 HEATHER DUNN RD	18.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	11.00
111		41_32	61A, 61B	61B	61B	OFF BYFIELD RD	3.49	0.00	2.11	1.38	3.49
TOTAL							8,402.34	5,215.22	848.56	1,993.44	8,057.22

TABLE G. State, NGO/Land Trust, and Privately-owned Conservation Restriction and Agricultural Preservation Restriction Lands

MASS GIS OPEN SPACE DATALAYER

SITE NAME	FEE OWNER	OWNER ABRV	OWNER TYPE	GIS ACRES	DEED ACRES	ASSESSED ACRES
STATE						
Mount Watatic Reservation	DCR - State Parks and Recreation / Dept. of Fish and Game	DCRS/DFG	S	46.086902	280	0
Mount Watatic Reservation	DCR - State Parks and Recreation / Dept. of Fish and Game	DCRS/DFG	S	235.570367	280	48.5
Watatic Mountain Sanctuary	Department of Fish and Game	DFG	S	90.67347	95.05	84
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	77.488119	64.98	64.98
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	37.167075	213	37
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	42.08094	213	38
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	30.481969	23	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	124.859029	0	150
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	88.333767	88.3335	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	34.353942	0	28
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	1.511046	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	13.198188	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	0.841791	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	21.765597	23.5	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	72.491845	70.6	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	51.78351	51.7	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	1.522623	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	24.954937	82.5846	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	59.15603	82.5846	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	5.811706	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	2.023482	213	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	12.40167	213	13
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	16.000356	16	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	22.338324	16	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	4.405778	113.94	8.06
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	106.547948	0	102
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	74.188621	75	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	70.05249	0	28
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	48.837022	94.27	49.76
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	129.759141	130	130.6
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	704.479206	0	534.3
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	44.679859	94.27	44.51
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	59.335804	0	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	101.89097	0	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	45.725236	43	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	72.596133	0	62
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	133.903433	0	174
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	14.954249	14.95	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	105.878851	113.94	105.88
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	45.676887	41	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	66.188558	65.566	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	35.070368	0	36
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	11.66229	0	14.1
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	28.512889	30	0
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	88.525628	213	75
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	61.392069	63.9	104.9
Ashburnham State Forest	DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	DCRS	S	51.959906	52.11	52.1
Ashburnham WMA	Department of Fish and Game	DFG	S	59.531285	272	0
Ashburnham WMA	Department of Fish and Game	DFG	S	202.256724	272	0
Ashby WMA	Department of Fish and Game	DFG	S	67.333938	67.3	0
High Ridge WMA	Department of Fish and Game	DFG	S	49.102355	539.9	112
TOTAL STATE				3,597.34		2,096.69

TABLE G. (Continued)

SITE NAME	FEE OWNER	OWNER ABRV	OWNER TYPE	GIS ACRES	DEED ACRES	ASSESSED ACRES
MUNICIPAL						
Bush Hill Conservation Area	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	448.26	450	0
Bear Meadow Brook Conservation Area	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	51.350304	52	50
Conservation Area	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	19.532143	0	0
Russell Hill Conservation Area	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	166.040001	205	0
Waltari Bluefield Conservation Area	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	18.60227	24	24
New Cemetery	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	20.30469	0	0
Ashburnham State Forest	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	26.570462	26.6	0
Fitchburg Water Supply Land	City of Fitchburg	M097	M	16.258202	0	0
Fitchburg Water Supply Land	City of Fitchburg	M097	M	2.535439	0	0
	City of Gardner	M103	M	40.566002	0	0
TOTAL MUNICIPAL				810.019513	757.6	74
CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION/LAND TRUST						
Jewell Hill Farm Project	Massachusetts Land Conservation Trust	MLCT	G	10.64146	85.93	0
Jewell Hill Farm Project	Massachusetts Land Conservation Trust	MLCT	G	72.701169	85.93	0
Lake Wampanoag Wildlife Sanctuary	Massachusetts Audubon Society	MAS	L	101.48629	0	0
Lake Wampanoag Wildlife Sanctuary	Massachusetts Audubon Society	MAS	L	19.625288	74.21	0
Lake Wampanoag Wildlife Sanctuary	Massachusetts Audubon Society	MAS	L	51.674248	74.21	0
Old County Road Conservation Area	Massachusetts Audubon Society	MAS	L	102.666606	392	0
Old County Road Conservation Area	Massachusetts Audubon Society	MAS	L	285.457704	392	0
Center Street Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	0.273132	0	0
Cheshire Pond Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	10.757562	10.76	0
Ferin Road Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	40.45481	43	0
Watatic Lake Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	2.579161	2.88	0
Young Road Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	1.622563	0	0
Young Road Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	1.591219	0	0
Young Road Conservation Area	Ashburnham Conservation Trust	ASCT	L	17.810256	0	0
Paul Dunn Woodland Preserve	Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust	MGLCT	L	157.842137	0	165.74
Byfield Road Conservation Area	North County Land Trust	NCLT	L	48.221265	53	0
TOTAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION/LAND TRUST				925.40487		165.74
NON-CR AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION RESTRICTION						
Reed Charles O APR	Reed Charles O and Doris V		P	44.883525	48.5	46.17
TOTAL NON-CR AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION RESTRICTION					48.5	
CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS						
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	0.610161	0	0
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	1.557564	0	0
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	0.081175	0	0
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	1.247648	0	0
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	255.059432	0	303.8
Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club CR	Fitchburg Sportsmens Club		P	453.567946	792.99	517.52
Town of Ashburnham I CR	Northeast Wood Design LLC		P	0.789035	13	0
Town of Ashburnham I CR	Northeast Wood Design LLC		P	12.127393	13	0
Town of Ashburnham II CR	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	5.340796	389.3	0
Town of Ashburnham II CR	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	0.692384	389.3	0
Town of Ashburnham II CR	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	368.479848	389.3	0
Town of Ashburnham III CR	Town of Ashburnham	M011	M	68.388012	72.2	0
Beals Trust CR	George C. Beals Trust		P	110.657179	125	0
Beals - Packard Hill CR	Beals Whitney A		P	35.105974	36.5	0
Beals - Wyman Lot CR	Beals Whitney A		P	122.410306	550	0
Beals - Wyman Lot CR	Beals Whitney A		P	246.499259	550	0
Beals - Wyman Lot CR	Beals Whitney A		P	227.613267	550	0
Fitchburg Reservoir Project CR	Crocker Alfred C and Cassano Stephanie L		P	14.664158	122.06	0
Fitchburg Reservoir Project CR	Rice James P and Mona I		P	51.276929	50	0
Hagar CR	Hagar Sr Phillip H		P	47.861386	54.53	0
Hartshorn I CR	HARTSHORN		P	466.018854	465.6	465.6
Hartshorn III CR	Hartshorn Family Limited Liability Co.		P	91.4675	97.1	0
Hartshorn III CR	Hartshorn Family Limited Liability Co.		P	1.630735	97.1	0
Hartshorn III CR	Hartshorn Family Limited Liability Co.		P	4.800986	97.1	0
Hartshorn - Brooks Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	61.981185	280	80
Hartshorn - Cashman Hill Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	84.472951	280	60
Hartshorn - Converse Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	34.835238	280	32
Hartshorn - Coughlin Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	74.353381	100	32

TABLE G. (Continued)

SITE NAME	FEE OWNER	OWNER ABRV	OWNER TYPE	GIS ACRES	DEED ACRES	ASSESSED ACRES
CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS (CONT'D)						
Hartshorn - Coughlin Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	18.449282	100	32
Hartshorn - East Ringe Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	60.099246	55	32
Hartshorn - Eaton Hill Lot CR	Hartshorn Sally Q		P	72.587496	280	67
Hood CR	Hood Judith D		P	3.786397	35.37	0
Hood CR	Hood Judith D		P	5.114096	35.37	0
Hood CR	Hood Judith D		P	13.587447	35.37	0
Hood CR	Hood Judith D		P	11.766466	35.37	0
Hood CR	Hood Judith D		P	0.51481	35.37	0
Johnson CR	JOHNSON WOODWARD T		P		39.5	
Johnson CR	JOHNSON WOODWARD T AND FLORENCE M		P	2.084296	22.9	0
Johnson CR	JOHNSON WOODWARD T AND FLORENCE M		P	13.615317	22.9	0
Johnson CR	JOHNSON WOODWARD T AND FLORENCE M		P	7.799281	22.9	0
LeVaux CR	Levaux Howard A		P	9.65829	120.735	0
LeVaux CR	Levaux Howard A		P	64.033983	120.735	0
LeVaux CR	Levaux Howard A		P	23.194468	120.735	0
LeVaux CR	Levaux Howard A		P	19.961142	120.735	0
Montalvo-Huhn & Huhn-Montalvo CR	Montalvo-Huhn Orlando C. and Huhn-Montalvo Barbara J.		P	91.598773	89	0
Somers CR	Somers Lois K. and Paul		P	75.212019	83.7	0
Somers CR	Somers Lois K. and Paul		P	10.044701	83.7	0
Thoma CR	Thoma Sallie C		P	81.217331	79.69	0
Woodward CR	Woodward Robert E. and Virginia A.		P	5.996138	6.0002	0
TOTAL CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS				3,433.91		1,621.92
NOT IN GIS OPEN SPACE DATALAYER						
Arel	AREL SARAH Q				15.3974	
TOTAL NOT IN GIS DATA LAYER					15.3974	
NEW CONSERVATION COMMISSION PROPERTIES (SINCE 2017)						
Murray Road	Town of Ashburnham				44.39	
Williams Road	Town of Ashburnham				0.45	
Hemlock Road	Town of Ashburnham				6.04	
Winchendon Road	Town of Ashburnham				7	
Depot Road	Town of Ashburnham				9.5	
Bray Avenue	Town of Ashburnham				1	
Bray Avenue	Town of Ashburnham				7.64	
Howes Court	Town of Ashburnham				16.05	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.31	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.3168	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.3857	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.5739	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.551	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.6589	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				1.4974	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.7346	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				1.4274	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.2755	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.4477	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				0.5514	
Lakeview Drive	Town of Ashburnham				2.1374	
TOTAL NEW CONSERVATION COMMISSION PROPERTIES					101.9377	
GRAND TOTAL				8,811.56		4,004.52

TABLE H. Town-Owned Open Space - Conservation & Recreation Lands

Map	Parcel	Name	Location	Acreage	Status	Funding*	Use	Condition	Zoning	Public Access**	Manager	Description
10	8	Bluefield Reservation	Young Rd	26.6	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland, some upland
10	8B	Bluefield Reservation	Young Rd	21	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland, some upland
10	11	Bluefield Reservation	Young Rd	48.6	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland, some upland
6	15	Bush Hill Town Forest	Tuckerman Rd	1.4	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland, some wetland
6	16	Bush Hill Town Forest	Tuckerman Rd	1.2	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland, some wetland
6	17	Bush Hill Town Forest	Tuckerman Rd	1.2	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland, some wetland
6	2	Bush Hill Town Forest	Tuckerman Rd	405.7	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland, some wetland
6	8B	Bush Hill Town Forest	Tuckerman Rd	25.2	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec NH	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland, some wetland
6	26	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	9.77	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	27	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	7.14	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	28	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	5.5	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	29	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	4	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	30	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	3.6	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	31	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	3.7	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	32	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	2	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
6	33	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.23	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland

TABLE H. (Continued)

Map	Parcel	Name	Location	Acreage	Status	Funding*	Use	Condition	Zoning	Public Access**	Manager	Description
7	1	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	14.3	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec NH	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	2	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	6.7	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec NH	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	17	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.1	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec NH	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	18	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.1	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec NH	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	9	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	3	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	4	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	10	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.2	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	12	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.1	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	14	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.9	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	15	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1.1	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
7	16	Bush Hill Town Forest	Bush Hill Rd	1	Protected	LAND/FL/D/DCR	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Mostly upland
4	15	N/A	Depot Rd	9.5	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
4	10	N/A	Winchendon Rd	7	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly upland, some wetland
51	55	N/A	Sherbert Rd	5.1	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland
12	44	N/A	Upper Naukeag	0.67	Protected	--	Open Space	Watershed	RB	Drinking water protection	ConCom	Wetland
14	25	N/A	Winchendon Rd	4.2	Protected	--	Open Space	Forested	RB	PRec	ConCom	Upland
18	5A	N/A	Murray Rd	44.39	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	LIA	PRec	ConCom	Mixed upland/wetland
20	48G	N/A	Williams Rd	0.45	Protected	Donation	Open Space		RA	PRec	ConCom	Mostly upland

TABLE H. (Continued)

Map	Parcel	Name	Location	Acreage	Status	Funding*	Use	Condition	Zoning	Public Access**	Manager	Description
20	81	N/A	Bray Ave	1	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RA	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland, some upland
20	81N	N/A	Bray Ave	7.64	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Forested	RA	PRec	ConCom	Mostly upland, some wetland
20	96A	N/A	Hemlock Rd	6.04	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RA	PRec	ConCom	Mostly wetland
29	5	N/A	Rindge State Rd	0.86	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	GB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Wetland
29	9	N/A	Rindge State Rd	16.6	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	GB	PRec	ConCom & CR by DCR	Wetland
56	1	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.31	Protected	Donation	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	28	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.53	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	29	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.53	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	42	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.59	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	43	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.62	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	44	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.69	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	46	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.67	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
56	47	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	1.43	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland with lake access
56	49	N/A	Lakeshore Dr	0.26	Protected	Tax taking	Open Space	Wetlands	RB	PRec	ConCom	Wetland
39	28	Russell Hill Town Forest	Russell Hill Rd	210	Protected	Land Grant and donations	Open Space	Forest & Field	RB	PRec	ConCom	Mostly forest, some fields
29	13	Mount Watatic	Rindge State Rd	48.5	Protected	Land Grant and donations	Open Space	Forested & peak	RB	PRec	Mt Watatic Mgmt Comm (Town 1/6 ownership)	Forested & Mountain peak
59	36	Whitney Field	South School St	6.27	Protected	--	Little League Field	Field	RA	Rec	Town of Ashburnham	Little League Field
58	111	Sweeney Playground	South Main St	1.6	Protected	--	Playground	Playground	RB	Rec	Parks & Rec	Playground
20	52	Multi-use Field	Williams Rd	11	Protected	--	Soccer field, Ash maintenance & Light Plant Bldgs	Mixed	RA	Rec	Parks & Rec, Ash Munic Light	Mixed use, old Town landfill

A map of **Chapter 61 Lands** is presented in **Appendix A, Figure A5**.

Pursuant to MGL Chapter 61:

“... all forest land, parcels of not less than 10 contiguous acres in area, used for forest production shall be classified by the assessors as forest land upon written application sufficient for identification and certification by the state forester. Such application shall be accompanied by a forest management plan. The state forester will have sole responsibility for review and certification with regard to forest land and forest production.

The rate of tax applicable to certified forest land shall be the rate determined to be applicable to class three, commercial property under chapter 59.

Land shall be removed from classification by the assessor unless, at least every ten years, the owner files with said assessor a new certification by the state forester.”

The following terms also are defined under MGL Chapter 61:

“Forest land”, land devoted to the growth of forest products. Upon application, the state forester may allow accessory land devoted to other non-timber uses to be included in certification.

"Forest products", wood, timber, Christmas trees, other tree forest growth and any other product produced by forest vegetation.

"Forest management plan" or "management plan", a completed copy of a form provided by the state forester executed by the owner and the state forester that provides for a ten year program of forest management, including intermediate and regeneration cuttings.

MGL Chapter 61A pertains to agricultural lands taxed as such, which is defined as follows:

“Land shall be deemed to be in agricultural use when primarily and directly used in raising animals, including, but not limited to, dairy cattle, beef cattle, poultry, sheep, swine, horses, ponies, mules, goats, bees and fur-bearing animals, for the purpose of selling such animals or a product derived from such animals in the regular course of business; or when primarily and directly used in a related manner which is incidental thereto and represents a customary and necessary use in raising such animals and preparing them or the products derived therefrom for market ...”

“ ... Land not less than five acres in area shall be deemed to be actively devoted to agricultural or horticultural uses when the gross sales of agricultural, horticultural or agricultural and horticultural products resulting from such uses together with the amount, if any, payable under a soil conservation or pollution abatement program of the federal government or the commonwealth total not less than five hundred dollars per year ...”

For tax purposes, recreation lands may be classified as such under MGL Chapter 61B:

“Land not less than five acres in area shall be deemed to be recreational land if it is retained in substantially a natural, wild, or open condition or in a landscaped or pasture condition or in a managed forest condition under a certified forest management plan approved by and subject to procedures established by the state forester in such a manner as to allow to a significant extent the preservation of wildlife and other natural resources, including but not limited to, ground or surface water resources, clean air, vegetation, rare or endangered species, geologic features, high quality soils, and scenic resources ...”

“For the purpose of this chapter, the term recreational use shall be limited to the following: hiking, camping, nature study and observation, boating, golfing, non-commercial youth soccer, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, skiing, swimming, picnicking, private non-commercial flying, including hang gliding, archery, target shooting and commercial horseback riding and equine boarding.”

OPEN SPACE PARCELS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST

The following sections discuss open space parcels of varying protection, ownership, and use.⁴² Each section highlights a certain level of protection and discusses the nature of ownership (public, non-profit, etc.) and current use for those parcels.

Town Owned Parcels

The Town owns approximately 850 acres of land including major conservation, recreation, and historic sites like Bush Hill (450 acres) and Russell Hill (215 acres) Conservation Areas, which are subject to the custody and care of the Conservation Commission.

Town-owned lands also include other Conservation Commission properties, as well as several active recreation facilities maintained by the Municipal Grounds Department, all of which are accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Bickford, Marsden, and Whitney Fields serve as baseball fields, while another multi-use field off Williams Road (Landry Field) was constructed to address the increased popularity of soccer. These four public athletic fields total approximately 16 acres. Park facilities with playground equipment include Winchester Park between Town Hall and the Stevens Memorial Library, and Sweeney Playground in South Ashburnham which also has basketball courts. Briggs Elementary School off Williams Road also has a playground available after school hours and during the summer.

The Town Common, Winchester Park, also is home to a bandstand. Outdoor summer concerts also are held there. Fifteen acres of abandoned rail line roughly parallel to Route 101 from Willard

⁴² Office of the Assessor. December 2021. *APR and Chapter 61 Lands, CR lands, and Certain Other State/Municipal, Religious and Organization Lands*. Town of Ashburnham. Ashburnham, MA.

Road just south of the Town Center to South Ashburnham could be used as a rail trail for multiple passive recreational purposes.

State Owned Parcels

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) holds or manages approximately 2,850 acres of land as the Ashburnham State Forest, while the MA Department of Fish & Game (DFG) owns +/- 750 acres. Another +/- 900 acres are owned by the Town of Ashburnham.

Ashburnham State Forest also surrounds Upper Naukeag Lake, which provides drinking water for the Towns of Ashburnham and Winchendon. The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) have also identified this land as habitat for state-listed rare species. Lake Wampanoag, part of which occurs within a component of the Ashburnham State Forest, has also been identified by NHESP as habitat State-listed for rare species.

Mount Watatic, is one of the most important assets for conservation and recreation in Ashburnham and features habitat for wildlife, a network of trails, and views of both the town and the region. The beautiful 84 acres of the Mount Watatic Wildlife Sanctuary is home to numerous bird species and is intersected by the Midstate and Wapack Trails. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and DFG co-own approximately 280 acres near the Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns property throughout Ashburnham in lands maintained by DCR. Approximately 112 acres of the High Ridge Wildlife Management Area, a designated “Watchable Wildlife Viewing Area,” extends into South Ashburnham from Gardner. Mixed hardwood and white pine stands are intermingled with wetlands and fields, offering a diversity of habitats. The Ashby Wildlife Management Area, located in Northeastern Ashburnham neighboring Mount Watatic, also offers similar wildlands. The Commonwealth also owns nearly several hundred acres on and proximate to Lake Wampanoag, complementing the land already protected by the Monadnock Trust and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Ashburnham State Forest lies to the east and west of the pond, further protecting this ecologically diverse area.

Proximate to and south of Mt. Watatic, State Forest lands extend from Route 119 to Lincoln Pond. This nearly 800-acre State Forest land abuts the nearly 900-acre Fitchburg Sportsmen’s Club (a Chapter 61 property). Fifty-two acres of State Forest are located near Packard Hill, southwest of the Upper Naukeag Reservoir and are abutted by approximately 270 acres of Chapter 61 lands. While these areas may legally allow public access, other than Mount Watatic, no public facilities or formal access points exist to invite visitors or facilitate recreational use.

Non-profit / Charitable Parcels

Apart from State and Town-owned land, approximately +/- 925 acres is protected by various conservation organizations including the Ashburnham Conservation Trust, North County Land Trust (NCLT), Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MGLCT), and Massachusetts Audubon Society.

The Ashburnham Conservation Trust (ACT), in partnership with the MGLCT, holds the conservation restriction on 388 acres of Mass Audubon Society properties along Old County Road in southwest Ashburnham, just above Lake Wampanoag. These lands contain vernal pools, the southern portion of Cheshire Pond, and multiple State-listed rare and special concern species. This land abuts the Monadnock Trust and Ashburnham State Forest and is not disability accessible.

The Monadnock Trust holds 313 acres of pristine woodland and wetlands surrounding Lake Wampanoag. The lake and much of the surrounding lands contain State-listed rare species habitat. The land also is surrounded by property owned and protected by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. The old Cheshire Railroad, which became part of the Boston and Maine rail network, traverses the woodland near the property.

The MGLCT owns several parcels, including the 166-acre Paul C. Dunn Woodland Preserve east of Sunset Lake. This parcel is located in sensitive water protection areas and abuts other conservation lands and areas of extensive development. It is a key buffer for wildlife habitat and water resources.

ACT has played an important role in facilitating partnerships for land conservation in Ashburnham. ACT independently owns 14 acres containing Bluefield Brook creating linkages to other protected areas including the 166-acre parcel held by the Mount Grace Land Trust. ACT also holds a 10-acre parcel on Cheshire Pond, donated by a local resident in response to development. As noted above, the MGLCT in partnership with ACT owns a conservation restriction on an abutting 388 acres that connect to Lake Wampanoag and South Ashburnham. In addition, the Massachusetts Audubon Society owns the 377-acre Lake Wampanoag Wildlife Sanctuary. Although primarily located in Gardner, approximately 51 acres of the sanctuary extend into Ashburnham, thus connecting the Town of Ashburnham and the City of Gardner. The old Cheshire Railroad line passes through this area and the potential exists to develop a rail trail along this corridor between Gardner and Winchendon, which will act as an extension of the existing rail trail in Ashburnham's village core.

In addition, ACT owns the peninsula that juts into the north end of Lake Watatic where they provide public access for passive recreation and maintain a picnic area. Nearby they own an additional 40 acres of woodland.

ACT has also spearheaded many major land acquisitions inside Ashburnham by collaborating with other non-profits, and Town and State agencies to protect areas such as Mount Watatic, Bush Hill, Russell Hill, the Bluefield Brook area, and a host of other key land acquisitions, some reaching into Winchendon. The Mount Watatic Reservation was formed in July 2002, when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Management (now DCR), in conjunction with the Ashby Land Trust, Ashby Conservation Commission, Ashburnham Conservation Commission, and Ashburnham Conservation Trust purchased 281 acres on Mount Watatic including the 1,832-foot-high bald summit. In 2004, the Town purchased 448 acres on Bush Hill with grants from the DCR, Federal Forest Legacy, and assistance from the ACT along the northwest boundaries between Winchendon, MA and Rindge, NH.

Since then, Winchendon has protected an additional 239 acres abutting Bush Hill and Rindge has protected 221 acres as the Sandback Reserve for a total of 1,200 acres in an area of interest to various conservation agencies in both states. Bush Hill also includes the Harvard Shaker Farm that features the Enoch Whitmore House, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in February 2008 as part of the Underground Railroad in Massachusetts.

In 2007, the Ashburnham Conservation Trust, in collaboration with the Ashburnham Conservation Commission, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the National Parks Service, the Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust, and an anonymous donor, purchased a 205-acre parcel on Russell Hill. Lastly, the 24-acre Bluefield Brook Reservation in North Ashburnham contains a stream and wetlands that are part of the Millers River Watershed. These waters weave through an additional 22 acres in the Whitney/Dunn Conservation Area, which was given to the Town by private donors. Across the road, Ashburnham Town Forest contains 50 acres of upland forest and wetlands. The Bluefield and Bear Meadow Brooks, part of the Millers River watershed, border a section of Town Forest. High school students developed the Bluefield Trail 25 years ago as a marked nature trail and after years of neglect, the ACT has revitalized it. The Town Forest borders 14 acres of State Forest, further protecting the area.

The North County Land Trust (NCLT) owns a 53-acres wooded parcel bounded by Byfield Road on the west and the Ashby Town boundary on the east. This property was donated to NCLT by Helen Kirby and is known as the Kirby Conservation Area. The Kirby CA is a public access conservation area, featuring beautiful streams and rolling hills. The area abuts the Town of Ashby's 175-acres Wiita Conservation Area to the east, and the NCLT plans to construct trails which will connect to the Wiita CA. The Kirby CA has been permanently protected by a drinking water supply protection conservation restriction held by the City of Fitchburg. The NCLT also has also facilitated the conservation of more than 135 acres of sensitive watershed land that protects the City of Fitchburg's public water supply, including the north side of Jewell Hill, visible from Russell Hill Road. There are an additional 600 acres of unprotected land within Fitchburg's water supply watershed. The City of Fitchburg also owns 15 acres of the former Kirby property on Wilker Road for water supply protection.

Finally, in 2020 the NCLT joined with the state Division of Fish and Wildlife to purchase 200 acres on Watatic's south slope. The DFW will retain 186 acres that abuts the Watatic Reserve and includes the popular views from the south peak. NCLT will own 15 acres to be used for outdoor events and environmental education.

Parcels without Permanent Protection

There are numerous unprotected Town-owned lands, most of which are small and of limited conservation value. Other properties, such as various parcels along Lakeshore Drive that abut lakefront lands already under the custody and care of the Conservation Commission, would expand an area of diverse wildlife habitat consisting of mixed upland, wetland, and open water (Lake Watatic) communities.

Numerous large parcels of privately owned land exist and have the potential for conservation or

recreation purposes. Often, owners of large parcels experience pressure to develop or convert land use and/or sell their property in such a way that alters the property from its forested or agricultural state. As an alternative, the government offers landowners significant local tax benefits in exchange for a long-term commitment to **Forestry (Chapter 61)**, **Agriculture (61A)**, or **Recreation (61B)**. These benefits effectively reduce a landowner's tax burden and thus ameliorate some of the pressure to sell all or a portion of their land. Penalties (assessed as rollback or conveyance taxes) occur in the Chapter 61 programs when a landowner takes the property out of the program prematurely and/or converts land from its qualified use.

In addition, **Chapter 61 programs** specifically target large parcels and those without minimum acreages do not qualify for these benefits. Consequently, the Chapter 61 programs may not be suitable for connecting important recreational trail systems through existing low-density development areas made of small parcels. In this case, the Town would have to acquire the land through grants for recreation land or easements.

Although Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B are not means of protecting land in perpetuity, it creates the opportunity for the Town to have a say in the use of its land. The Right of First Refusal (ROFR) on any lands under the program gives the Town of Ashburnham the opportunity to purchase parcels at fair market price when they are put up for sale. The Town can then weigh the cost of purchase and preservation as open space versus the cost of services as residential or other development. Therefore, although Chapter 61 programs are often viewed as a loss of tax base for the Town, this loss may be less than the potential cost of providing municipal services. During 2021, the Town received ROFR notices on two (2) parcels totaling approximately 68 acres. In each case, the purchase price was prohibitive.

Currently, the Town follows MGL guidelines when ROFR notifications arise and is in the process of preparing a summary of those guidelines as they relate to ROFR under the Chapter 61 Program. This will provide guidance to Town officials, residents, and Town Boards and Committees so that everyone will be best prepared to act in accordance with the law and in a timely manner when such opportunities arise. Such a guidance document will become an important tool for the Town and its Chapter 61 landowners. Being prepared is key and maintaining an up-to-day Open Space inventory and prioritized list of lands of open space interest and value, for either conservation or recreation purposes, can be the difference between competitively pursuing a potential opportunity to acquire a desired community asset or missing out on the chance all together.

In addition to the ROFR clause, with Chapter 61 programs, the Town has a mechanism to receive a portion of back taxes from the owner should they leave the program or convert it to another use. While Chapter programs cannot permanently protect land, they do give the Town an opportunity to buy the land outright or assess back taxes to recoup the cost of services. The program also encourages and allows Ashburnham and its residents to preserve the character of the town on their own terms.

Many large parcel owners in Ashburnham are enrolled in the Chapter 61 program (See **Appendix A, Figure A5**), making it an effective method of partially, or temporarily protecting open space for forestry, agriculture, and recreation and the associated conservation and wildlife values and benefits. **Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B tax reduction programs** provide important tax incentives

for owners to keep land in large contiguous parcels for a designated period of time, however, it is not a permanent form of land protection. The following is an inventory of private parcels that are not protected permanently, but managed as forest, farm, or recreation land through the **Chapter 61 Program**.

Chapter 61: Forestry

At current estimate, approximately 5,215 acres of land are in the Chapter 61 program, although the town assessor's office continues to validate enrollments for all chapter lands that may be outdated. Recreation groups and private trusts own some of the largest land holdings. These lands are committed to the strict use of harvesting of forest products. A qualifying parcel with a minimum of ten acres is assessed by the value the land has for forest production purposes on an annual basis. Ashburnham has large, forested areas, and the Chapter 61 program can preserve them as open space; an assessment under the Chapter 61 program greatly reduces the tax burden for large parcel owners based on the valuation of their property as managed forestland, especially in an increasing valuation at the fair market price.

Chapter 61A: Agriculture

At current estimate, the town only has about 850 acres of land enrolled in the Chapter 61A program. Like Chapter 61, it provides an alternative tax assessment below the fair market price. Chapter 61A encourages farmers with a minimum of five acres to continue farming while enjoying a reduced tax burden and thereby preserving historic farmland. The program values land for agricultural production, e.g., blueberries and the farming of other crops. Almost every type of agricultural activity or use qualifies for the program. However, qualification is restricted by previous use and production. To qualify, a parcel must have been in agricultural production for the past two years and produced agricultural goods at a minimum rate of \$500 for the first five acres, \$5 for every acre after that, and \$0.50 for any forest or wetland acreage.

Of the 850-acre Chapter 61A lands, there are two properties in the APR program totaling approximately 71 acres.

Chapter 61B: Recreation

At current estimate, approximately 1,995 acres of land are enrolled in the Chapter 61B program. Chapter 61B similarly reduces tax assessments on properties classified for recreational use. The program qualifies parcels of five acres or more that commit their use to the preservation of wildlife and/or other natural values including: water resources, clean air, rare species, high quality soils, geologic features, scenic resources; or commit their use to a qualifying recreational purpose including hiking, camping, golfing, horseback riding, skiing, swimming, etc. Parcels under Chapter 61B are then assessed at their recreational use value, which can be no less than seventy-five percent of its fair market value. In this program, the parcel must be maintained in a substantial natural state and must not interfere with the environmental benefits of the land. Further, in the case of wildlife or natural value preservation, the parcel does not have to be open to the public, as it would if classified for recreational use.

Chapter 61: Mixed

Certain lands in Ashburnham are multi-classified under the State's Chapter 61 program. Collectively, these properties encompass a mixture of Chapter 61/61A, Chapter 61/61B lands, and Chapter 61A/61B lands.

LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST

Many parcels of conservation or recreation interest in Ashburnham are held by non-profit groups including the Boy Scouts of America, church and civic groups, or by private owners. Not all of these parcels are protected in perpetuity and the Town has identified many as areas of interest including parcels that contain public trails and critical wildlife habitat. For the most part, site specific data regarding properties of interest as shown in **Figure 17** were derived from MassGIS⁴³ and the Ashburnham Assessor's Department database.⁴⁴

Some parcels are held as recreation land by nonprofit organizations without specific commitments to conservation: efforts could be made to permanently conserve these properties.

- The Ashburnham State Forest abuts almost 900 acres owned by the Fitchburg Sportsmen's Club. The dam onsite, owned by the Club, controls downstream flows from Wallace Pond to Lake Watatic and, subsequently, to Lower Naukeag Lake.
- The Boy Scouts of America owns 95 acres on the southwest tip of Lake Winnekeag. Camp Split Rock is leased to the Boy Scouts by the Split Rock Trust and has 800 feet of shoreline that climbs steeply up a forested slope, wetland, and open fields. The dam to the lake abuts Camp Split Rock and is owned and maintained by the Lake Winnekeag Association Inc. which recently purchased the dam from the Munksjo Paper Inc.
- The Apostolic Lutheran of Eastern Mass has 40 acres of land on Route 12. The Church abuts 140 acres of State- and Town-owned land.
- Camp Wellville, owned by the Rollstone Congregational Church, occupies 40 wooded acres on the western shore of Lake Winnekeag, including 400 feet of shoreline. Camp Wellville is a seasonal use community for private meetings and lodging.
- Camp Winnekeag, owned by the Southern New England Conference, is located on the northern shore of Lake Winnekeag. The Conference operates a cafeteria, and lodgings on the property. Prior to the pandemic of 2020 to present, it served 7-8 weeks during the summers as a youth camp, which uses 770 feet of shoreline gently sloping up to forested land. The camp is open year round, offering both weeklong and weekend groups. The camp is maintained by the employees of the Southern New England Conference. The Midstate Trail intersects the forested area of the Camp. Two other parcels owned by the

⁴³ <https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov/MassMapper/MassMapper.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.axisgis.com/AshburnhamMA/>

church are developable lots and the remaining acreage is wetland. There are no conservation restrictions on this land.

- The Southern New England Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists also owns just over 200 acres adjacent to the north side of Lake Winnekeag west of Route 101 (Ashby Road), as well as nearby lands east of Ashby Road.
- Cushing Academy's campus is located in the center of Town and is composed of administration, dormitory, athletic fields, classrooms, and related facilities. The hillside topography with managed turf and trees is presently developed to capacity. Any land the school has acquired is left open for future development. Approximately 25 acres are used as athletic fields and courts with no public access. Most of the remaining land is composed of single-family dwellings located around the campus, which are used as residential facilities for the students and teachers. The property abuts 15 acres of land maintained by the Town as a cemetery. Cushing Academy also owns two large, undeveloped lots totaling 49 acres west of the New Cemetery/Old Nims Road. These two lots include forested walking trails that connect Main Street (Route 12) to Central Street (Route 101).

Other unprotected areas are of interest for natural or watershed protection, agricultural soils, or scenic resources. These broad areas have been highlighted in resource maps in previous sections.

The Midstate Trail, a marked trail originating at the top of Mount Watatic, features woods, fields, streams, and stone walls, and crosses both public and private land. Since the Midstate Trail links Ashburnham from north to south and connects Rhode Island to New Hampshire, Ashburnham views it as an important recreational asset. Acquiring land or easements to protect this from development is a high priority. The Wapack Range in New Hampshire begins in Ashburnham at the base of Mount Watatic. The Ashburnham State Forest is laced with old logging roads but, there is no formal trail system or public access points.

Mount Hunger is also an important leg of the Midstate Trail between South Ashburnham and Mount Watatic. Mount Hunger is permanently protected along with an additional 170 acres under a conservation restriction south of the mountain along the Midstate Trail. Mount Hunger is an important area offering recreational opportunities, majestic views, and trail connectivity. Parts of it remain unprotected and privately owned. It is a mountain rising 1,450 feet in elevation providing passive recreational opportunities like hiking and cross-country skiing and views of Ashburnham including the blueberry fields and forests of Russell Hill.

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program have designated several areas in Ashburnham as Priority Sites of Rare Species Habitat, such as Lake Wampanoag, Cheshire Pond, Lincoln Pond, Upper Naukeag Lake, Stodge Meadow Pond, Bluefield and Bear Meadow Brooks, Mount Hunger, and Nutting Hill. Future conservation efforts should prioritize Biomap 2 core habitat and critical natural landscape land where present (see **Figure 18**) and expand protected areas around Russell Hill and in southwestern regions of the Ashburnham State Forest.

Wetlands associated with Ashburnham's many lakes should be considered a high priority, as

should wetlands along the northern segment of Route 101. Aquifers may be further protected by conserving properties around Ward Pond, and along Ashburnham's southern boundary with Westminster near Westminster Street and Route 12.

Scenic landscapes to be protected are mostly hilled regions. Russell Hill, for example, still is incompletely protected along the eastern and western slopes, and there are hills north of the Town center near Packard Hill that remain unprotected.

Ashburnham's protected land is largely in the highlands and wetlands, while its prime soils are in relatively flat and dry regions. As a result, there is abundant unprotected prime farmland soil scattered throughout the Town, including an area that extends along Route 101 north of Lake Winnekeag to north of Billy Ward Pond, multiple properties between Lake Wampanoag and Lower Naukeag Lake, and in South Ashburnham north of South Main and Westminster Streets. Farms in these areas might be a priority for future APRs, of which Ashburnham currently has only two, held by private owners.

The historic impoundment of Phillips Brook in a 2.7-acre basin created the Bresnahan Pool, previously the only public beach facility in Town. However, this facility was closed decades ago due to irreparable damage and water quality concerns. The 'Naukeag Pool' located at the outlet of Upper Naukeag Lake, owned and operated by the Naukeag Lake Club, is a private/ members-only beach. Lake Watatic has limited public access via multiple adjacent Ashburnham Conservation Commission properties and Ashburnham Conservation Trust's Broadhurst Point.

Nonetheless, other permanent, accessible, and commonly available, public water access remains a high priority.

Ashburnham's natural resources, primarily its undeveloped forests, wetlands, and waterbodies, provide environmental, ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values and benefits not only for town residents, but also for the residents of many surrounding towns and the region.

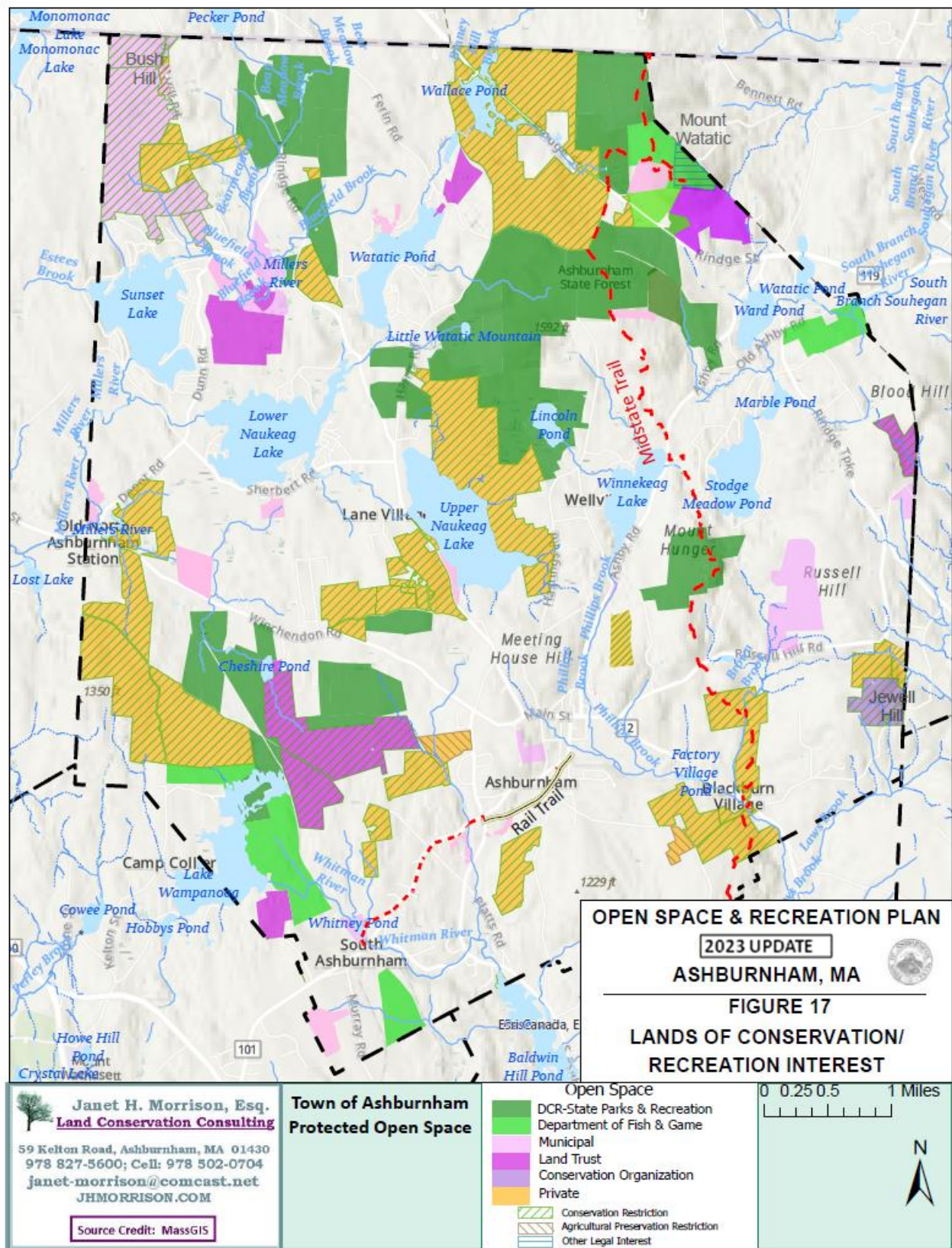


FIGURE 17. Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

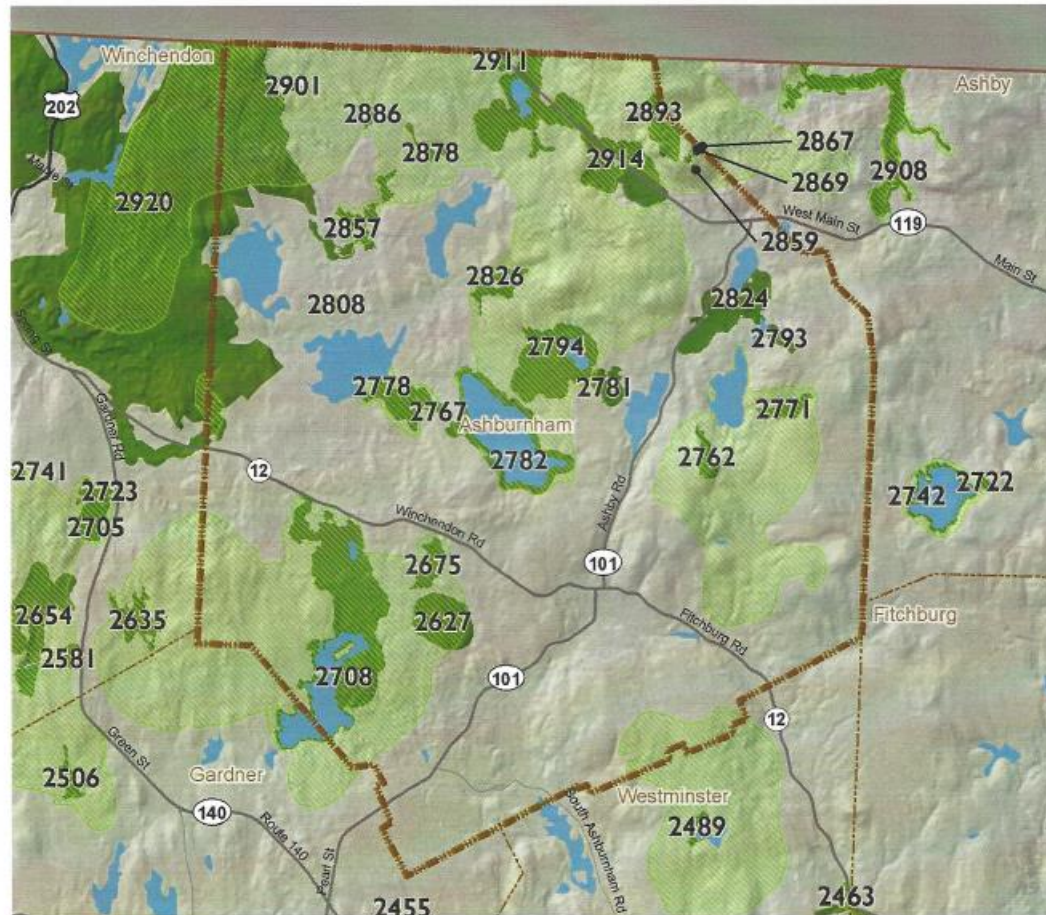


BioMap2

Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World

BioMap2 Core Habitat in Ashburnham

Core IDs correspond with the following element lists and summaries.



BioMap2 Core Habitat



BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscape

1 Mile



OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN

2023 UPDATE

ASHBURNHAM, MA



FIGURE 18: BIOMAP2 CORE HABITAT



Natural Heritage
& Endangered
Species Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

phone: 508-389-6360 fax: 508-389-7890

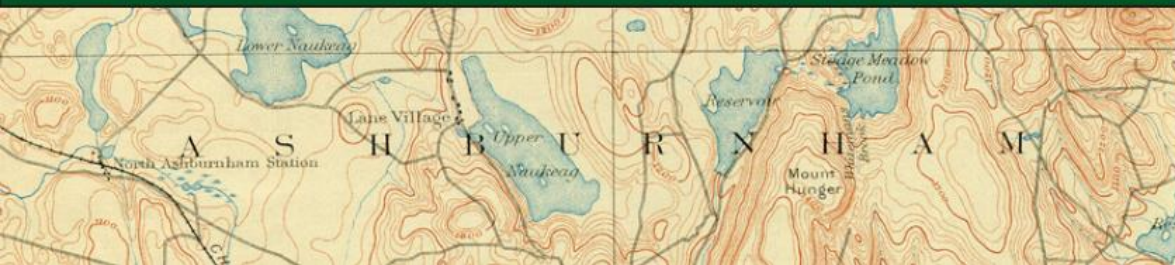
For more information on rare species and natural communities, please see our fact sheets online at www.mass.gov/nhesp.

FIGURE 18. BioMap2 Core Habitat

SECTION 6



Community Vision

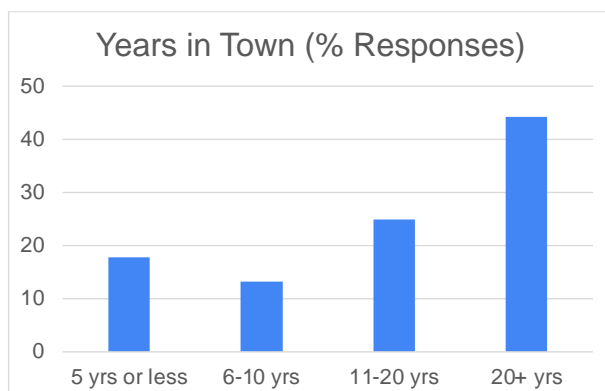


Section 6. Community Vision

A. Description of Process

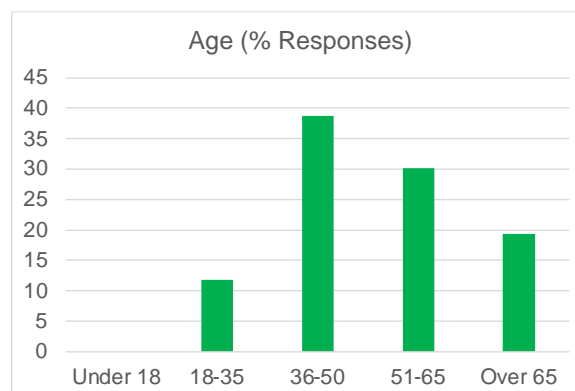
Public participation is an important part of any planning process, especially the establishment and prioritization of a community's vision, needs, goals, and objectives relative to open space and recreation. A public survey to gather information related to the community's values, needs, and goals relative to open space and recreation was conducted by the Town of Ashburnham in the fall of 2021.

The updated Open Space & Recreation survey, as reviewed and approved by the Select Board, was conducted between mid-October and mid-November 2021 (see Appendix B). The survey was offered online via the Town webpage (which also sends a notification email to enrolled residents), and the survey information was posted twice to several Ashburnham-related Facebook pages. In addition, paper copies of the survey were also made available in Town Hall, the Public Library, and the Ashburnham Market Place. A total of 197 responses were received; 184 were completed online and 13 hard copies were submitted at the Town Hall repository. The results exceed the number of responses received from the 2011-2012 Open Space & Recreation survey which had 150-180 responses (depending on the question), as well as the results from the 2007-2008 survey which received only 48 responses. Respondents represented a broad segment of the population except for children and teenagers under 18 years of age (See Responses 1 and 2 below).



Summary of Response to Question 1:

Most respondents (69%) have resided here for over 10 years.



Summary of Response to Question 2: Age

distribution of respondents trended a bit younger than in previous surveys, perhaps due to the preponderance of online responses. Still, there were no responses from people under 18 years old.

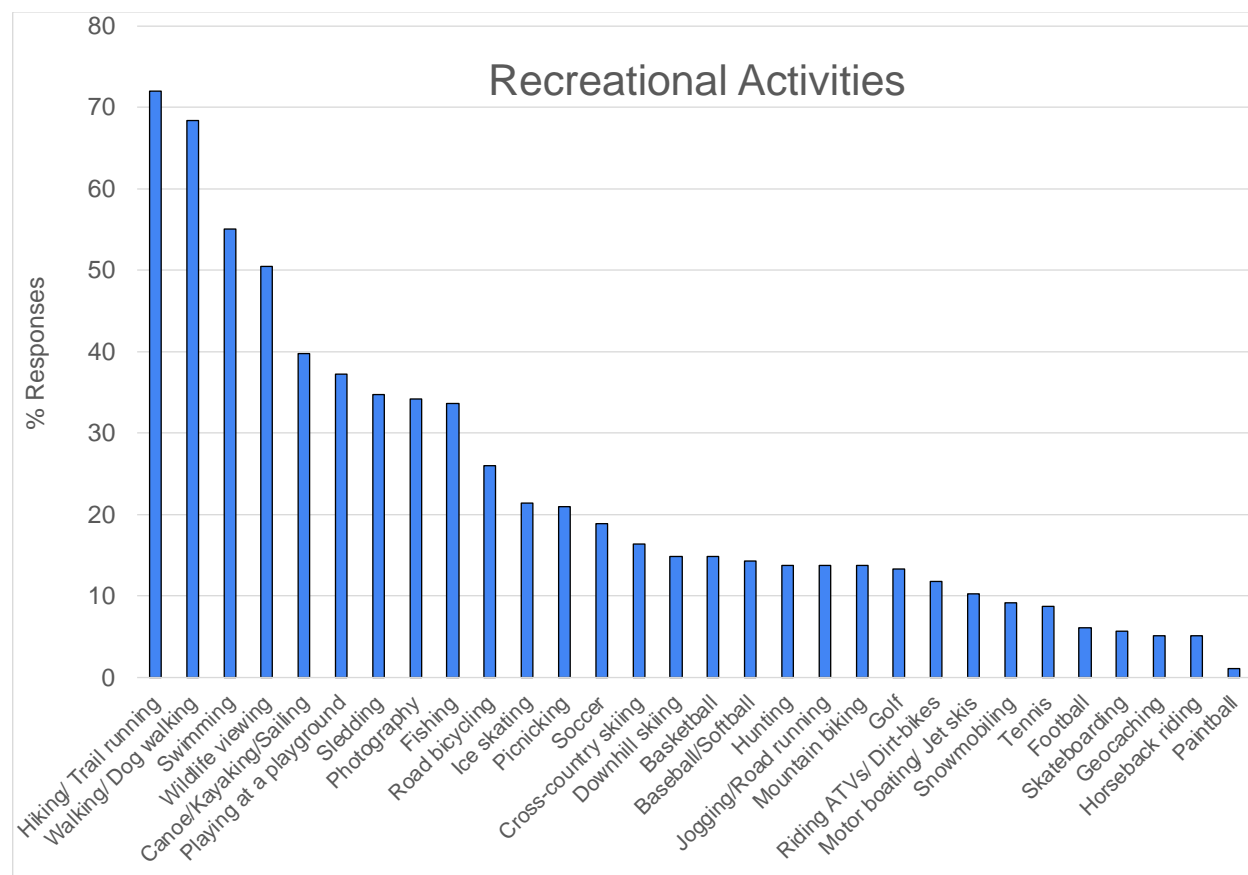
Based on the results of the current survey, residents engage in a wide range of outdoor activities, with hiking/walking/trail usage, swimming, wildlife viewing, boating, and playground use being most common. The value of hiking- and walking-trail usage is reflected in the respondents' selected ranking of 'Most Important Conservation Lands': Mt. Watatic, the Ashburnham & Winchendon Rail Trails, the Midstate Trail, and Jewell Hill. The survey results also indicated that the Ashburnham Rail Trail, Winchester Park (at Town Hall), scenic roadways and agricultural fields and farmlands are the most important municipal resources. In this regard, more than 50% of survey respondents stated that playgrounds/recreation areas and agricultural resources, along

with protected natural areas were most important relative to the Town’s investment in protecting, maintaining, and acquiring such open space and recreation lands. With respect to the Town’s ‘priorities for future investment, natural resource protection, hiking/walking/jogging and paved bike trails, public swimming access, and playgrounds and active recreation areas were deemed most important.

Several survey respondents, through general comments, also expressed the need or desire for improvements and maintenance to the Town’s parks and playgrounds, public access to waterbodies for canoeing, kayaking, and swimming, basketball courts downtown, rail-trail and multi-purpose pathway connections, and access to and availability of high-quality athletic fields for all sports. Four comments also referenced the need or desire for designated trails for allowable use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV) and off-highway vehicles (OHV), which may include snowmobiles, four-wheelers, dirt-bikes, and side-by-side recreational trail vehicles. One comment also noted the need for public hunting access.

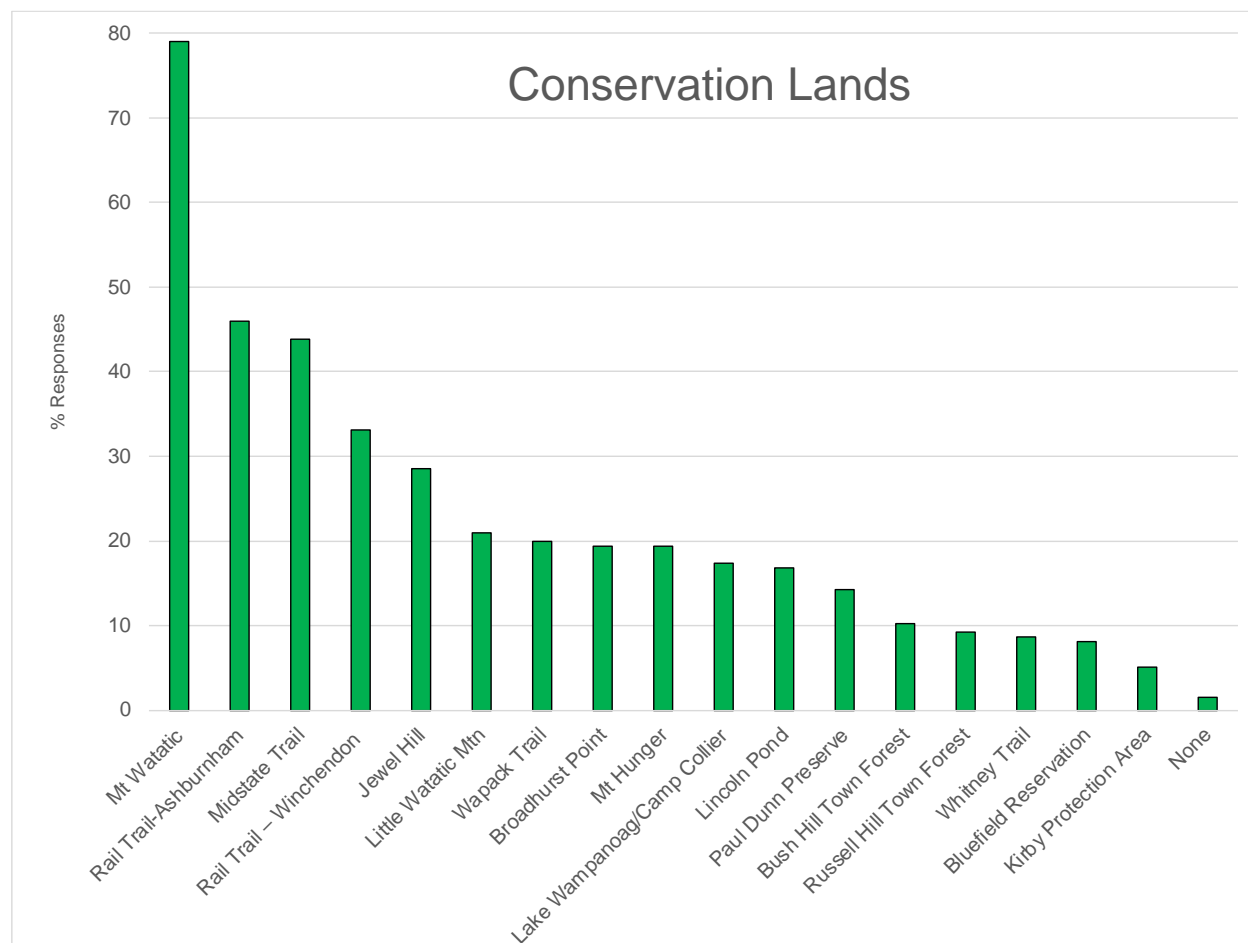
A full summary of the 2021 Open Space & Recreation survey responses is provided below, with the questions, response data, and comments provided for each survey question.

Question 3. Which *recreational activities* do you and your family/household regularly participate in? Check any that apply.



Summary of Response to Question 3: Residents engage in a wide range of outdoor activities. Passive recreation like hiking, trail running, walking, dog-walking, swimming, wildlife viewing, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and playing at a playground were most common.

Question 4. *Select up to 5 (five) **CONSERVATION LANDS** that are **MOST IMPORTANT** to you (if any).*



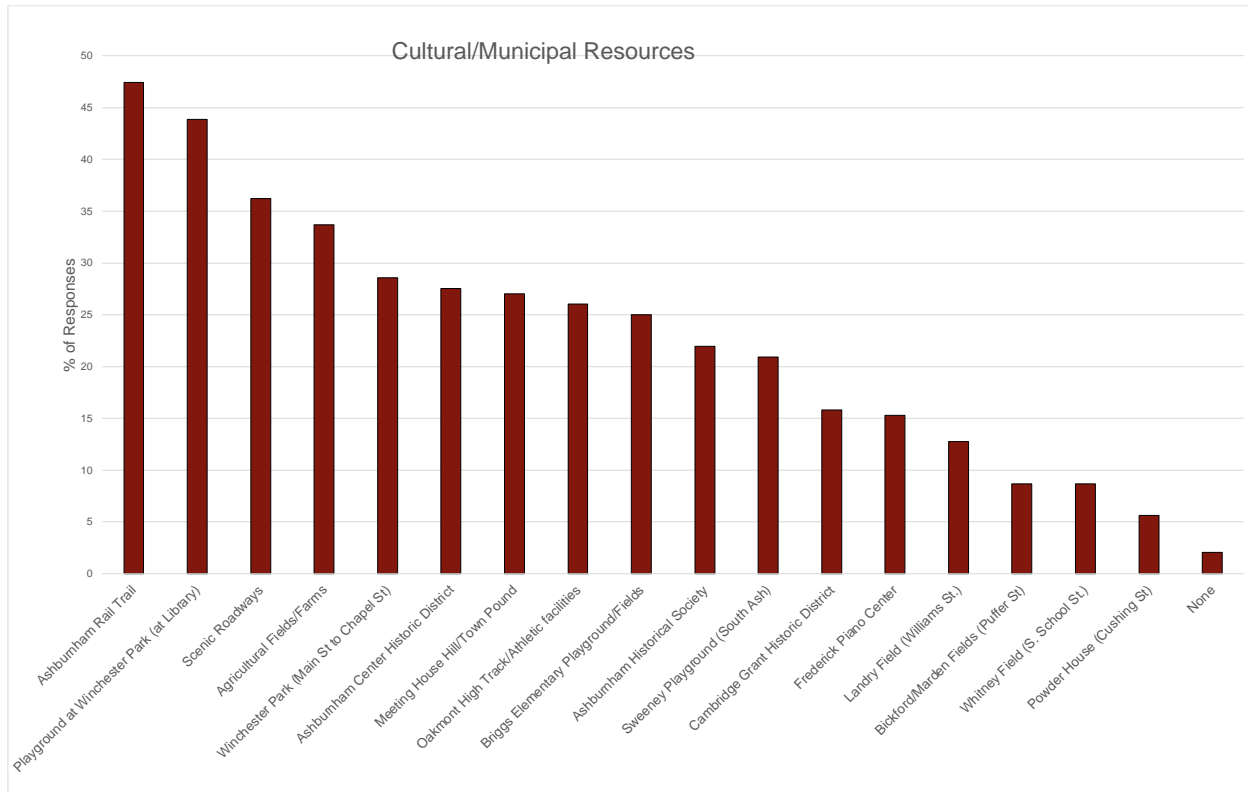
Summary of Response to Question 4: By far, the most popular conservation area is Watatic Mountain, listed with 79% of respondents. Other important areas include the Ashburnham Rail Trail (46%), the Midstate Trail (44%) and the paved Winchendon Rail Trail (33%). Jewell Hill also stands out among prized conservation properties.

Additional areas referenced as “other” conservation lands most important to respondents included:

- Undeveloped land Behind Oakmont RHS, which adjoins the Westminster State Forest and the High Ridge Wildlife Management Area
- Blood Hill
- Doucette Property (ACT)
- Old County Road and Cheshire Railroad Bed to Lake Wampanoag
- What’s most important are not isolated specific areas, but large contiguous tracts that afford the best corridors and non-fragmented habitats for wildlife passage and survival. Watershed

protection is paramount given our location as the head waters of 5 major watersheds. The fact that some of them have trails is very much appreciated but superfluous to the greater goals that these large tracts serve.

Questions 5. *Select up to 5 (five) **CULTURAL and MUNICIPAL RESOURCES** that are **MOST IMPORTANT** to you for recreation.*

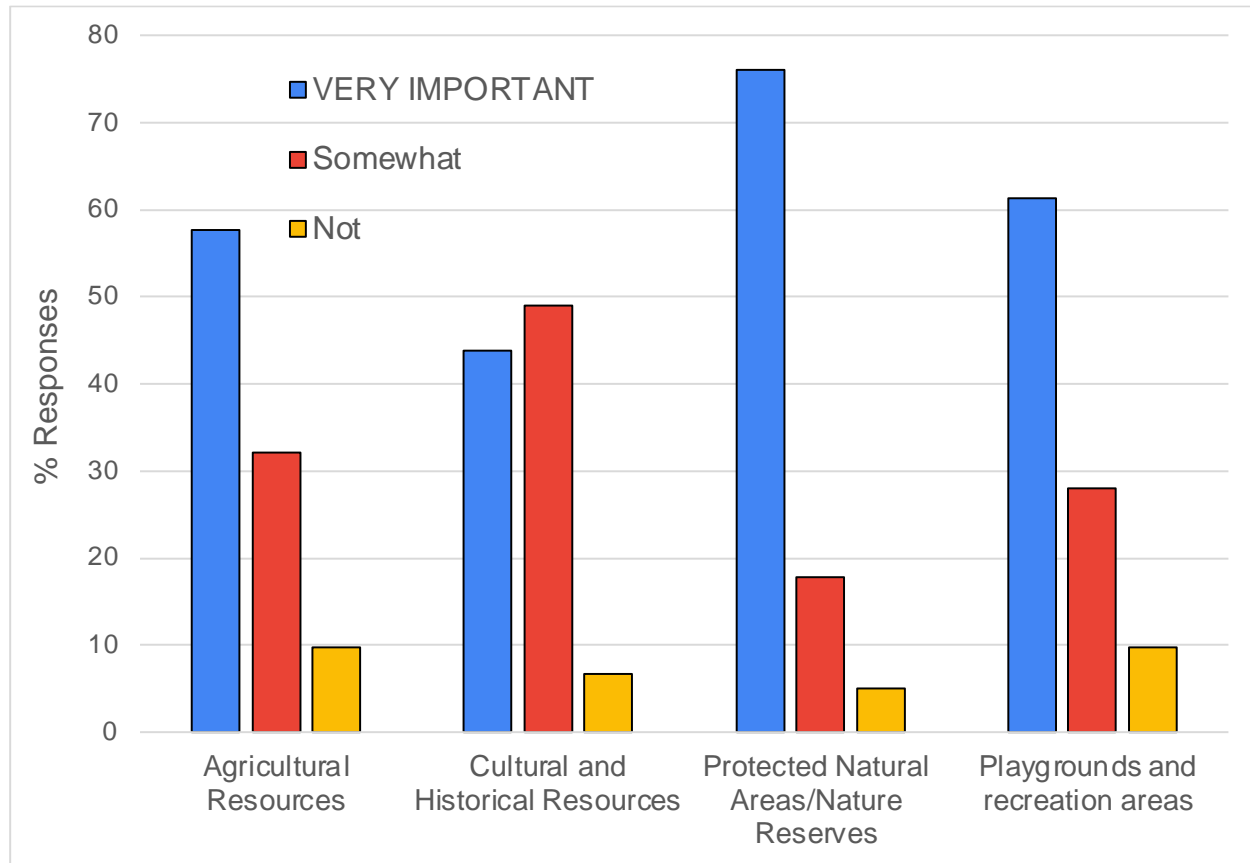


Summary of Response to Question 5: Residents value their local Rail Trail and Winchester Playground as the two most important municipal resources, along with the Town’s scenic and historical heritage.

Additional cultural and municipal resources that were referenced as “other” important resources included:

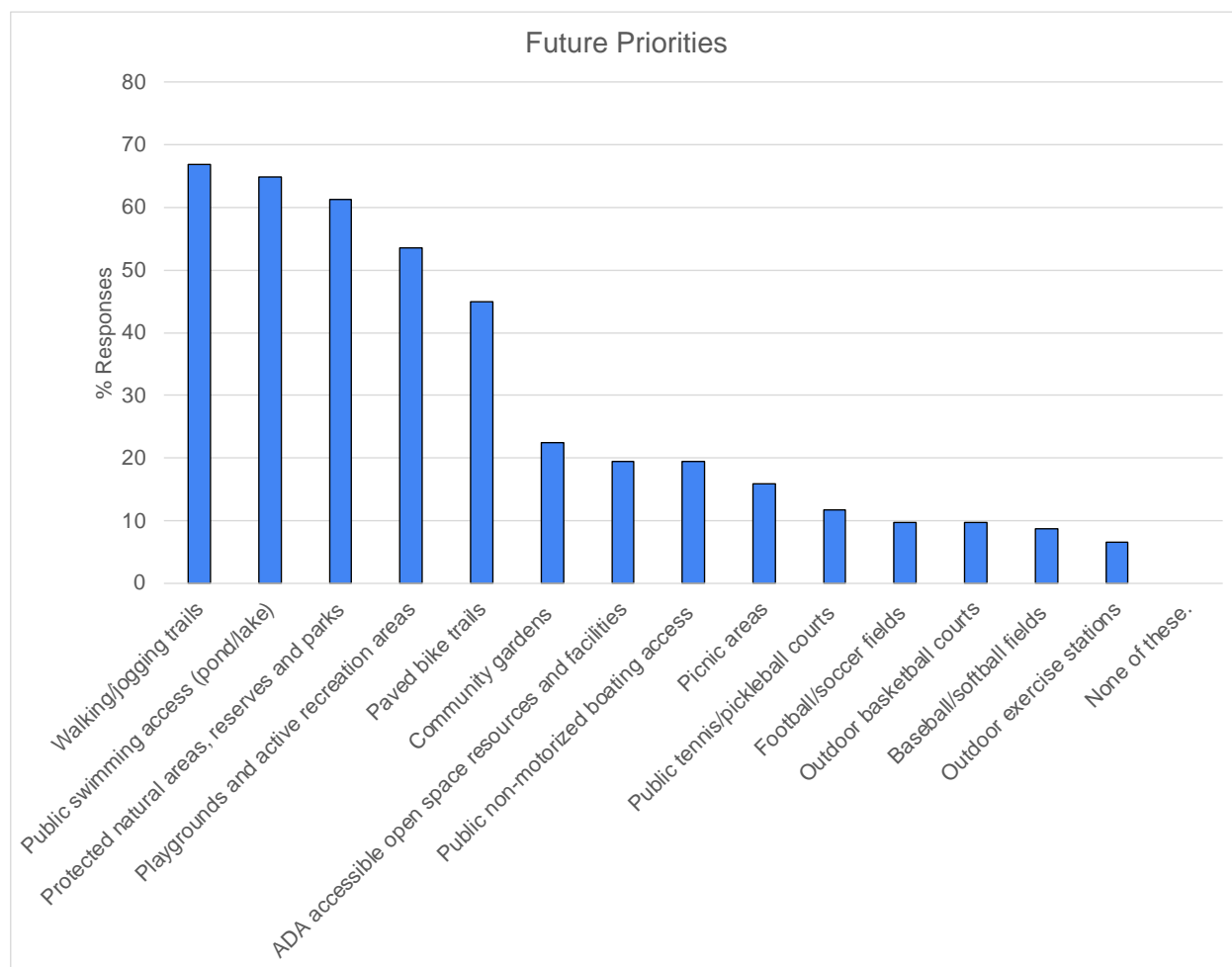
- Briggs Pond & old town pool area
- Creative Connections Art Gallery and associated programs
- Stevens Memorial Library
- Scenic roadways, except that they are spoiled by dead trees that can’t be cut or pruned.

Question 6. Please help us establish the Town priorities. ***Rate the importance*** of investing Town resources into protecting, maintaining, and acquiring each of the following: Agricultural Resources; Cultural and Historical Resources; Protected Natural Areas/Nature Reserves; and Playgrounds and Recreation areas.



Summary of Response to Question 6: Of these four categories, residents placed the highest importance on protecting natural areas and reserves. Each of the categories were considered at least “Somewhat important” by over 90% of respondents.

Question 7. Which specific open space and recreation resources should the town **PRIORITIZE for FUTURE INVESTMENT**, if any? Select only your top 5, at most.



Summary of Response to Question 7: Residents place their highest priorities on dedicating Town resources to trails, to public swimming areas, and to protected natural areas. These results are consistent with their favorite outdoor activities (Response 3) and the high value residents put on conservation (Response 6). Playgrounds and paved bike trails are also high priorities among resources that would require infrastructure.

- A public swimming area has appeared among the highest priorities of residents in each Open Space plan since 2001. Not surprisingly, it was the second-highest priority in the current survey, and thus constitutes a critical and unmet priority the Town needs to address.
- Two of the five highest priorities in this survey would be addressed by moving forward on a paved bike trail that will connect to a regional trail network.
- Playgrounds stand out as a priority, and comments from Question 8 focus on the need to address ‘run-down’ facilities in particular.

Examples of “other” open space & recreation resources that a few respondents indicated should be prioritized for future investment included:

- Paved recreational area(s) where people can walk/jog along the lakes scenic view.
- Community gardens
- Splash-pad for kids in the summer
- ADA accessible facilities
- Picnic areas
- Tennis/pickleball/basketball courts
- More sidewalks
- Bike trails
- ATV and side by side trails
- ATV/Dirt Bike Trails
- Designated ATV and snowmobile trails
- Cleaning up Briggs Pond – this was always maintained by Parks & Recreation. Cleaning up old town pool area - but not necessarily for swimming
- Community open air art installations
- Dog park
- Outdoor movies
- Public motorized boat access

Question 8. *Use this space for any other comments for the Open Space and Recreation Committee.*

Summary of Response to Question 8: Such comments included the following:

- There should be an outdoor **basketball court at Winchester Park**
- Public access to swimming and kayaking and **fixing Winchester Park playground** are top priorities
- It's time the town invests in its youth and give the **playgrounds** much needed attention
- Leave **Winchester Park** as it is
- Out **playgrounds** need TLC!!!!
- We have **awful playgrounds**. It is sad to know that I take my kids out of town to meet with other people from town to do playgroups. The equipment is old, broken and looks dangerous. Please prioritize the playground equipment at both parks
- We should have **basketball courts downtown** and sidewalks downtown
- **Athletic fields** should be one option, with demand deciding the proportion of funds for each. Our family used both soccer & softball when the kids played; we need to keep all four sports field types available.
- We need a **dog park!**
- A **resource/website** defining where all the public space is [located] would be helpful, or if one exists then better **marketing** of it. Most of what we've found has been word of mouth or All Trails.
- Committee needs to be **more active and visible** to be effective.
- We have too many **areas** that are **hard to get to** or use.
- It's important to not privatize all the **lakes**. In the summertime, it's difficult to find a place where one can refresh specially with kids.

- I was not aware of many of the outdoor spaces [identified within] this survey or that [public access for] residents who do not live on the lakes could [be provided by the Town or may already exist for] **access to swimming, canoeing and kayaking** on the lakes. Where is this access located and is their parking available?
- **Public access to swimming and kayaking** and fixing Winchester Park playground are top priorities
- We have many lakes in Ashburnham, and we have no access to swim or boat or picnic. About time we make it happen
- **Rail trail south ash to north Ash** would connect all the way to Winchendon and southern NH. Roads are no longer safe for walking or biking due to distracted drivers and poor road conditions.
- Please connect the **Ashburnham Rail Trail** (bottom of Willard) to the town center. It is dangerous to bike/walk into town even if it's a short distance to where the sidewalk starts. Paving the Rail Trail is my top pick otherwise.
- We should connect to **regional bike trails/paths**, and especially to the commuter rail in Fitchburg
- Connection trails between states for **ATV use**
- The town needs trails for OHV. Anything that teens can participate in and keep them out of trouble.
- Public hunting access
- Preserve history of Native Americans and African Americans who lived here long ago
- I'd like to see more **parades/pageants/gatherings**. Also, other historic markers other than war memorials, like **Native American** contributions, historic buildings etc. Much more **public art installations** and art shows, fairs, and events.
- **Too much lawn** in front of town hall. Can be much better utilized.
- We must keep Our Town as **natural** as possible!
- Would rather see the town fix the roads and bring industry to Ashburnham
- Thank you for your efforts
- Thank you for your time and commitment
- Thanks for caring enough to ask

In addition to the public survey, and in response to the review comments of an earlier draft of this Plan and its public participation process, several additional public meetings, including a public forum and stakeholder visioning session, which included a public presentation of the survey results and discussion of the Plan's Goals and Objectives, and a public presentation of the full draft of the Plan were conducted between November of 2022 and February of 2023. A public review and comment period was also held in conjunction with the public presentation of the Plan.

B. Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

The paramount, broad-scale goals of this Open Space and Recreation Plan reflect the vision of the community, with respect to existing and potential open space conservation and recreation opportunities, as well as the need to protect the Town's valuable natural resources and scenic, rural town character. Accordingly, the community vision statements presented below were established based on community input from the 2021 OSRP survey, and input from the Open Space and Recreation Committee and representatives of other Town boards, commissions, and committees,

members of the public, and relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the evaluations and information documented within the preceding sections of this Plan were also taken into consideration. The Community Vision is an expression of the community desire to maintain ecological, historical, recreational, and aesthetic values and benefits provided by protected, public open space lands.

Ashburnham's Community Vision, or statement of broad-scale community goals for the 2023 OSRP Update are presented below:

- I. Protect Natural Resources** using a balanced approach that identifies environmentally and ecologically sensitive or important areas and prioritizes the most valued areas for protection while identifying areas suitable for sustainable development and smart growth.
- II. Improve and Maintain Passive and Active Recreational Opportunities** to best meet current Community needs and provide high-quality recreational opportunities for all.
- III. Preserve the Rural and Historical Character of the Town** through the adoption of sustainable land-use practices and a proactive, inclusive, community-based approach to Open Space & Recreation Use, Stewardship, Planning, and Management.

The protection of natural, cultural, historical, agricultural, recreational, and related municipal resources is important to the community. Protecting these resources preserves the rural, scenic character of the Town. Increasing and maintaining passive and active recreational opportunities and providing and promoting access to quality recreational facilities, including parks and playgrounds, will benefit people of all ages and abilities and lead to a more active, healthy, and connected community.

Providing public access to the Town's many lakes for swimming, canoeing, kayaking, paddleboarding and fishing is an important part of the community's vision, especially given that Ashburnham has so many beautiful, high-quality waterbodies within its Town boundaries.

Similarly, maintaining and improving public parks and playgrounds, and advancing progress on the Ashburnham Rail Trail will provide substantial enhancements to the quality and availability of recreational opportunities available to the residents of the Town of Ashburnham. Such improvements will lead to increased recreational activity and more convenient access and connectivity to other important community resources such as schools, commercial areas, conservation areas, other open space and recreation areas, and, most importantly, Downtown Ashburnham. Rail Trails and high-quality, well-maintained parks and recreation areas often lead to other economic development benefits for Towns and their residents and businesses, such as increased commercial activity, and the concepts of "keeping it local" and "playing where we live".

Protecting natural resources, improving recreational opportunities, and preserving the Town's rural and historical character are all important parts of the Community Vision. However, balancing each of these important goals can be a challenging task for a Town that must also maintain other important community goals related to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, public services and facilities, mitigation of natural and man-made hazards, public health, education, and a multitude of other factors affecting a Town and its administration.

Given this, it is critically important to effectively utilize and enforce existing land use laws, bylaws, regulations, policies, and programs. It is even more important to review and to improve upon them when necessary. Strong, effective regulations promote wise and sound land-use and development decision-making processes that lead to sustainable development of the land and smart growth of the community. Such sustainable development and sound land-use decision making is essential to natural resource and open space protection and provides for their continued existence. In the case of Ashburnham, it preserves the integrity and exceptional level of quality of the Town's natural resources and open spaces.

Finally, it is essential to take a community-based approach to Open Space and Recreation Planning and decision-making. Involving the Community – townspeople and stakeholders, in addition to Town staff and officials – in the development, implementation, and ongoing evolution of this Plan provides an increased sense of awareness and appreciation for the value of public lands and spaces and the benefits that they provide.

The Community Vision expressed by the three broad-scale open space goals and vision statements above is intended to reflect the desire of Ashburnham's residents, to maintain the ecological, historical, and scenic, rural character, values, and benefits that Ashburnham currently possesses.

To achieve that vision, the specific needs of the community, regarding open space and recreation, must be understood. The following information, presented within Section 7 of this plan, provides a description of those open space "needs".

Ashburnham's residents continue to recognize the importance of protecting the town's natural resources.

SECTION 7

Analysis of Needs



Section 7. Analysis of Needs

A. Summary of Resource Protection Needs

Ashburnham's forest and water resources are the heart of the community. They are central to many recreational pursuits of interest to citizens and are critical for maintaining the ecological health of many natural communities. Thus, they should be a top priority for protection. Maintaining water quality requires intact woodlands adjacent to wetlands, streams, lakes, and ponds to help filter contaminants and reduce erosion. This is especially important for Upper Naukeag Lake, the potable water supply to portions of Ashburnham, and to Winchendon, and for existing high quality, cold-water fisheries waters, including:

- Brown Brook from the Russell Hill Town Forest to Phillips Brook
- Cushing Brook from Hastings Road to Phillips Brook
- Laws Brook from Jewell Hill to the Westminster town boundary
- Phillips Brook from Lake Winnekeag to the Westminster town boundary
- The South Branch of the Souhegan River
- Willow Brook from Lake/Packard Hill Roads to the Whitman River
- The stream connecting Lincoln Pond with Lake Winnekeag
- The Whitman River from Lake Wampanoag to the Westminster town boundary

Maintaining water quality also is important to groundwater resources, which supply many of Ashburnham's residents with drinking water through private wells. In addition to supplying Ashburnham residents with drinking water and recreational opportunities, the water within Ashburnham's borders flows into the rivers of other downstream towns, eventually affecting water quality in forty-seven Massachusetts towns, another 9 in New Hampshire, and at least 22 more in Connecticut. It is hard to imagine that water from Ashburnham flows through at least 78 communities, 10 counties, and three states on its path to the ocean through the region's two largest river systems the Merrimac and Connecticut. Since poor water quality has the potential to negatively affect downstream resources, maintaining high water quality within the town has positive effects on the whole region, including the estuarine ecosystems of Long Island Sound and the Gulf of Maine, where Ashburnham's streams eventually meet the ocean.

Unregulated or poorly planned development can negatively impact water quality. The Water Supply Protection Overlay District protects Upper Naukeag Lake by controlling future development-related activities but, at least to some extent, existing homes and roads contribute to point and non-point source pollution through failing septic systems, erosion, sedimentation, stormwater runoff, and inappropriate disposal of household contaminants. As such, vigilance on the part of the Town to ensuring responsible development sensitive to environmental resources, as well as ongoing water quality testing, such as that conducted in conjunction with operation of the Lake Road Water Treatment Plant, can help to determine if current regulations are effectively protecting water quality.

In addition to providing services for Ashburnham residents, the water resources are also important habitat supporting numerous species, including several listed by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Many

of these species, as well as other wildlife enjoyed by residents such as moose and black bear, rely on large, contiguous areas of habitat for survival. A connected network of habitat ensures that wildlife will have food and shelter required for survival, and breeding and nesting grounds to maintain viable populations. Protected natural communities also can benefit Ashburnham's residents and visitors via their picturesque scenery, and wildlife observation and hunting opportunities.

Currently, Ashburnham has approximately 8,000+ deeded acres [~6,400 (State) + 285 & 100 (Municipal) + 1,215 (Conservation Organization/Land Trust)] under permanent protection, with an additional area of approximately 8,060 acres in Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B programs.⁴⁵

Linking separated parcels to reduce the impact of habitat fragmentation caused by development remains a goal of the Town. To develop a series of protected, contiguous corridors of habitat, a priority list of parcels for potential acquisition needs to be developed that considers water resources, important habitat, and proximity to protected parcels.

Connections in the northwest corner of Ashburnham may be most effective for protecting habitat and natural resources. A large area of protected, and partially protected land (e.g., lands surrounding Lake Watatic) exists northward from Upper Naukeag Lake to Mount Watatic and on into New Hampshire, an important piece of the Quabbin to Cardigan Collaborative's regional plan. This Q2C plan is a multi-state, public/private effort to protect and connect large non-fragmented forests in the Monadnock Highlands of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Further, a more substantive connection between the Mount Watatic conservation area and Bush Hill would provide the missing link between main eastern and western sides of town.

Another important linkage goal pertains to the connection of the relatively large area of protected and chapter lands in the western portion of Ashburnham with protected/chapter lands in the southern, central, and northern portions of the town. Acquisition of key parcels in these areas, as well as between them, will serve to establish wildlife corridors and protect water resources and habitat. It is acknowledged, however, that the southern portion of town may be more suitable for development due to its existing infrastructure (e.g., municipal water and sewer). One exception to this is the watershed associated with Phillips Brook, a cold-water fishery.

In addition to supporting wildlife and water quality, open space lands foster and protect recreational corridors. The existing Midstate Trail is much beloved by residents and visitors alike, yet much of the land it crosses is under no form of protection. In some cases, the trail parallels roadways, creating unsafe conditions. Acquiring more land or usage agreements with property owners along the trail's primary route would help to decrease the extent of unsafe trail conditions and ensure the trail's future in Ashburnham.

Collaboration with State conservation agencies will allow the town to better leverage its resources in key areas. DCR is especially interested in protecting a wildlife corridor in northern Ashburnham between conserved lands proximate to Sunset Lake, and conserved land around Mount Watatic.

The Ashburnham Rail Trail, when completed, will connect Downtown Ashburnham to South

⁴⁵ <https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov/MassMapper/MassMapper.html>

Ashburnham with a safe, scenic, and non-motorized 2.5-mile recreational route for residents, children, cyclists, hikers, walkers, runners, physically challenged individuals, and others. The northern end of the Rail Trail will provide users convenient access to the many existing downtown businesses and food service operations, as well as providing excellent opportunity for future growth in this area. Along the route, the Rail Trail may provide access to the Post Office, municipal soccer fields, J.R. Briggs Elementary School, and the William J. Bresnahan Community Center.

At the South Ashburnham termination, a goal of connecting the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the North Central Pathway of greater Gardner and Winchendon via the abandoned Cheshire Branch of the former Boston & Maine Railroad is being explored. With this connection, Ashburnham stands to be a major entryway to a tri-state network of rail trails.

To date, the Town has acquired ownership and/or rights to most segments that comprise the Rail Trail. In 2007, a 25% Design Plan was completed for the Town by Fay, Spofford & Thorndike LLC (now Stantec), and an application for an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation was submitted to and approved by the Ashburnham Conservation Commission. Challenges that lie ahead for completion of the Rail Trail include:

- Parking and access point delineations
- Clearing, grading and surface preparation
- Bridge surface reconstruction at Whitney Pond
- The condition and status of Whitney Pond Dam
- Bridge construction or bypass at the brook crossing west of Williams Road
- Road crossing measures at Route 101⁴⁶
- Municipal, State and Federal permitting

These issues and others are anticipated to be addressed in future studies.

B. Summary of Community Needs

Several respondents to the 2021 Open Space and Recreation survey expressed, through general comments, the need or desire for improvements and maintenance to the Town's parks and playgrounds, public access to waterbodies for canoeing, kayaking, and swimming, basketball courts downtown, rail-trail and multi-purpose pathway connections, access, and availability to high-quality athletic fields for all sports, designated, allowable trails for ATV/OHV use, and public hunting access.

While known as "The Town of Many Lakes," the availability of public swimming and boating access in Ashburnham currently is limited. The Town currently owns land on Watatic Lake, Little Watatic Pond, and Whitney Pond. However, only the Lake Watatic parcels presently appear to constitute viable but constrained public access alternatives. As previously described, studies and environmental permitting activities presently are underway for the potential removal of the Whitney Pond Dam, while the presence of wetlands constrain access to Little Watatic Pond.

⁴⁶ A multi-use side path is included in the FY25 Rt 101S Reconstruction TIP project. The road crossing measures at Route 101 listed as a challenge are being addressed in the TIP design.

In the Town's 2021 survey of community recreational needs, the following existing uses and future open space/recreation priorities were emphasized:

- Hiking/jogging/walking and paved bike trails
- Water access for swimming, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and fishing
- Public playgrounds and active recreation areas

Ashburnham's community priorities are consistent with the survey responses associated with the 2017 *Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*.⁴⁷ As stated therein:

"When asked what three activities they participated in the most over the past 12 months, the most frequent responses can be broken down into two categories: water-based recreation (specifically, boating [canoe/kayak/power boat], fishing, swimming at beach/lake/river, swimming in pool, paddle boarding, and tubing) and trail-based recreation (hiking, biking [on/off road], cross-country skiing, walking/jogging on trails, and mountain biking).

The 2017 Massachusetts SCORP survey also asked what activities users would like to see funded in the future. The top responses fell into three categories and corresponded closely to the types of activities users participated in most frequently:

1. trails (hiking, biking, paved walkways, trails with access for people with disabilities, and mountain biking), 2. playgrounds (for ages 2-5, designed for people with disabilities, for ages 6-12, and for ages 6 months to 2 years), and 3. water (swimming pool, canoe/kayak access, and fishing areas)."

The activities most desired for future funding, as identified in the Statewide SCORP survey, are also in line with those identified within the 2021 Ashburnham Open Space and Recreation Survey listed below:

- Walking/Jogging Trails
- Public Swimming Access (Lakes/Ponds)
- Protected Natural Areas, Reserves, and Parks
- Playgrounds and Active Recreation Areas
- Paved Bike Trails
- Public Non-motorized Boating Access
- Athletic Fields and Courts (several types listed)

The needs of the Town's youth and families with younger children is of particular importance. As noted in Section 5, three playgrounds (Briggs Elementary School, Sweeney Playground, and Winchester Park) and four ballfields (Marden, Bickford, Whitney, and Landry) are maintained for families, including town leagues that include pre-K youth through teens. Further, the Community

⁴⁷ MA Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs. December 2017. *Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2017*. Submitted to the National Park Service. Boston, MA.

Events and Playground Committee (CEPC) and the Town Library play a role in addressing the needs of all age groups, from toddlers and teens to the Town's senior citizens, with a focus on programming for children under 12, while the Council on Aging (CoA) focuses on activities and other issues primarily of interest to seniors. Ashburnham's public library, The Stevens Memorial Library, provides a range of robust programming for all ages including teens, and young adults, and adults. As in the past, the CEPC held a tree-lighting ceremony last December in front of Town Hall, and its 10th Annual Easter Egg Hunt for pre-K and children in Grades 1-5 on April 2, 2022.

Additionally, the CEPC again is proposing an all-ages summer concert series at Winchester Park, adjacent to Town Hall. Discussions between the CEPC and the Select Board also are ongoing relative to Winchester Park Playground.

The specific needs of the Town's younger youth for improved parks and playgrounds, as expressed within the open-ended Question 8 of the survey, include needed improvements to playgrounds, the need for additional basketball courts, access to waterbodies for swimming and other waterfront recreation, and the availability of athletic fields of all types. At the time of this update of the Plan, the current focus and highest priority of the CEPC is the replacement of the Winchester Park Playground. Additional concerns related to the availability of athletic fields to meet the needs of growing, and increasingly popular sports programs, particularly soccer, football, and lacrosse were also raised by representatives of local youth sports program stakeholder groups.

Further, the needs of senior citizens and aging adults should also be considered, especially given that ages 51-65 and Over 65 accounted for close to 50% of all survey respondents. Stakeholders of this age-group expressed an interest and need for accessible trails and pickle-ball courts. Currently, pickleball courts are set up on the second floor of Town Hall in the Council on Aging (CoA) auditorium using portable nets, as there is no outdoor court or other suitable space available. The Town is currently negotiating an agreement with Cushing Academy for the public use of its Academy Street Tennis Courts for pickleball activities to address this need for seniors, and other potentially interested age groups. This opportunity is expected to be available by spring 2023. Recent activities hosted by the CoA include Christmas concerts, twice-weekly line dancing, pickle ball games, a performance of Irish music, a painting class, a craft day at the library, Mother's and Father's Day luncheons, and a performance by a professional comedian. Special health-related events have been held, as well, including a fitness class, a strength and balance class, and a blood pressure clinic.

In addition to the higher priority needs discussed above, other community needs were also identified within the recent Open Space and Recreation Survey (See Section 6 above, particularly survey questions 7 and 8). Consequently, besides the top-ranked priorities, the feasibility of making these other priorities a reality should also be considered.

Many of the priority open space/recreational facilities involve trails, multi-use trails that provide for hiking and fitness in the summertime, and skiing and sledding in the winter, activities that appeal to and accommodate people of all ages. Therefore, it is necessary to consider those varied needs and take steps to make Ashburnham's trails and other recreational areas safe and accessible for all. To this regard, the Ashburnham Council on Aging, in coordination with the local, non-profit Rail Trail Committee, applied for and received an AARP grant in 2019 to improve a section

of the trail for easier access to seniors, and volunteers have been improving bridges and boardwalks over wet areas. In 2021, Ashburnham was awarded a Rapid Recovery Program (RRP) grant. Its consultants highlighted the importance of connecting downtown to its natural resources – most importantly trails. In spring 2022, the Ashburnham Select Board approved \$3,000 to design improvements on the Rail Trail from Willard Road to Cashman Hill Road which will be the basis for a Mass Trails Grant application to improve trail accessibility for all users. In response to the RRP recommendations the Select Board allocated funding for “Hike Ashburnham” trail signs in the summer of 2022. In May 2022, a forum was held with the Conway School of Landscape Design to discuss options for Winchester Park and the former Bresnahan Town Pool adjacent to Phillips Brook. Options included walking paths for seniors, an outdoor stage, expanded library programming space, and playground structures. A comprehensive climate resilient landscape plan, “Reimagining Winchester and River Street Parks”, was completed in June 2022. Continuing to pursue funding and promote projects that increase accessibility, particularly for older, disabled, and aging adults is a critical need, especially given the high proportion of older adults participating in the Open Space and Recreation survey.

There also is great community interest in increased boating, swimming, and fishing access for Ashburnham’s lakes. In some places, this conflicts with management needs, such as on Upper Naukeag, a public water supply reservoir which is closed to all boating access out of concerns for water quality. Currently, there only is limited car top access to Little Watatic Pond at Route 119, Lake Watatic from Broadhurst Point, Lower Naukeag Lake via the Sherbert Road causeway, and Lincoln Pond, but access is not easily accommodated.⁴⁸ If and when provided, however, boating access should be accompanied by user education and programs to help prevent the spread of lake-related nuisance aquatic and invasive species.

Approximately one-third of the OSRP Survey respondents listed ‘Agricultural Fields/Farms’ as a priority community resource. While Ashburnham has over two dozen parcels that would be considered farmland, only five of these parcels are permanently protected. To protect the region’s food security, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust and similar organizations have proposed several criteria to prioritize farms for permanent conservation:⁴⁹

- Parcels with a higher amount of prime agricultural soils, especially when that soil is already in productive fields rather than forested.
- Parcels with the greatest threats of development, and/or less distance to other permanently protected land.
- Farms with sufficient infrastructure already built to continue a working farm.
- Farms with more historical/community significance, scenic value, and/or economic activity in the local economy.
- Farms that provide vegetables, orchards, meat and/or dairy for food security.

Ashburnham has the potential to increase its agricultural production and enhance regional food security. The need for local and regional food production and distribution was illustrated and

⁴⁸ Note: The Sherbert Road causeway access to Lower Naukeag Lake presently is posted as ‘Private Property’. In fact, the vehicle pull-off at this location is located within the right-of-way of Sherbert Road. As such, the use of this pull-off does not constitute an unlawful trespass.

⁴⁹ Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, 2019. *Ashburnham Farmland Inventory*.

magnified by the recent Covid-19 pandemic, especially in the late spring and summer of 2020, when circumstances related to the pandemic led to food distribution interruptions and limited availability of important foods such as meat, poultry, bread, pasta, flour, and some grains. According to a 2019 report from Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, “93% of prime and statewide important farmland soils in the town are not being utilized for food crops, fodder, or pasture.”⁵⁰ Of course, much of the area designated as “prime” soils are now heavily forested, and have sequestered significant amounts of carbon, thus making the conversion of existing forests into farmlands counterproductive. Several small farms, however, recently have been on land that was never considered “prime,” and some have started even in residential areas. With proper soil management and regenerative techniques, more land could be farmed than what is indicated from NRCS soil maps alone. Regardless, protecting areas of Prime Agricultural Soils is an important community priority based on the importance given to Agricultural Resources in the recent survey and the needs discussed here.

Over the past decades, the population of Ashburnham has grown increasingly older, as demonstrated in part by the age (51-65 and over 65) of approximately 50% of the OSRP survey respondents. Consequently, consideration should be given to the needs of this older population. To keep them positively engaged in Ashburnham, however, consideration also should be given to the needs of teenagers and young people. Just as importantly, ADA accessibility should be prominent amongst the Town’s open space and recreation facility goals and objectives. Landry Field on Williams Road, Bickford and Marden Fields off Puffer Street/Maple Avenue, Whitney Field off Ashley Court are fully accessible to people of all abilities and provide many recreational opportunities to the broader community. While the Sweeney Playground on South Main Street and Winchester Park next to Town Hall are accessible to people of all ages and abilities, there are some concerns that they may lack some features or possess characteristics that make them non-inclusive. For instance, a wheelchair cannot fit through the gates at Winchester Park Playground, and the wood-chip surfacing is difficult for wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers to navigate. Also, the Sweeney and Winchester playgrounds are accessible to people of all abilities. Improvements to address these types of issues would benefit Sweeney Playground and Winchester Park Playground, alike.

The Bush Hill and Russell Hill properties may provide new opportunities for accessible passive recreation trails. The Ashburnham Rail Trail also will provide opportunities, as it is already hard-packed and level from Cashman Hill Road to Williams Road and multi-use lanes along Route 101 will be incorporated in the near future (anticipated FY 2025).⁵¹ Not all protected town lands are equally accessible: the Bluefield Reservation and Young Road properties, for example, have hilly topography and are not amenable to providing recreational opportunities for the physically challenged, and there are no currently maintained trail systems or parking areas at these sites.

C. Management Needs/Potential Changes of Use

Based on the Town’s recent Annual Reports, the maintenance of existing and construction of additional recreational facilities is budget constrained within the Municipal Grounds Department under the Department of Public Works and the Community Events and Playground Committee.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* MGLCT.

⁵¹ Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Project # 609244 – Ashburnham Roadway Rehabilitation on Route 101.

Whether the Town will be able to increase the budgets of these departments is unknown. Moreover, residential volunteerism is low. Targeting clubs and individuals that make use of current recreational facilities may be a successful way to enlarge the volunteer pool.

Attracting new members to the Ashburnham Open Space and Recreation Committee, particularly from younger age groups, also is anticipated to benefit the community implementation of the Action Plan outlined herein.

Within the densely settled areas of the Village Center and South Ashburnham, historic buildings and abandoned lots have the potential to be reused as new industrial, commercial, or residential complexes. Utilizing mixed-use and in-fill principles in these areas, rather than outlying undeveloped lots, would help to protect natural resource areas, as well as decrease infrastructure costs and maintenance. Future development also potentially threatens the Midstate Trail. In 2020, the clearing of a large lot off Stowell Road forced the unfortunate relocation of a short segment of the trail. Priority should be given to permanently protecting this popular recreation destination and cultural resource.

Along Route 119, access is provided to recreational trails located on Mount Watatic, including the Midstate Trail. Most of this area constitutes important wildlife habitat, including aquatic and terrestrial habitats of State-listed rare species. As such, any potential development in the Route 119 corridor needs to be meticulously scrutinized so as to preserve the character of the landscape and existing unobtrusive conditions. Currently, this area has very little development and is appreciated as one of the few areas in the region where lighting does not interfere with stargazing. Encouraging businesses to establish in the Village Center and South Ashburnham, where development already exists, would help to protect the natural resources and rural character of the Route 119 corridor. In this regard, relocating the existing Department of Public Works facility, now located in the Village Center Commercial District, would provide vacant land, and foster such ‘downtown’ development.

In situations where the Town budget is limited or constrained, identifying alternative sources of funding for Open Space and Recreation is an important management need. Potential alternative funding sources or strategies such as applying for state and Federal grants have been successfully secured in the past. Consideration of adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) has been discussed in previous versions of the Plan and should continue to be part of the discussion of this current update of the Plan. Passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA) could also help to protect Ashburnham’s scenic and rural character by raising and appropriating funds for historic preservation, open space protection, affordable housing, and public recreation projects. It benefits the community by creating a dedicated, locally controlled fund to support a broad range of important projects that Ashburnham could not otherwise afford. In the past, residents’ unwillingness or inability to pay further taxes has prevented the passage of the CPA. Education and outreach materials about the CPA, its benefits for the community, and actual costs (per average home-owner) should be developed and provided to residents to raise awareness and garner the support of Town residents.

SECTION 8

Goals and Objectives



Section 8. Goals & Objectives

The three primary community visions, eleven goals, and corresponding objectives of the Ashburnham Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Update were developed based upon public input related to the community visions and needs identified from the results of a public survey (197 total responses) conducted from mid-October to mid-November 2021. Additional meetings were held with Town officials (including relevant Board, Commission, and Committee Members), the public, and interested stakeholders and planning staff from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission between November of 2022 and April of 2023 to review and gather input on the proposed Goals and Objectives of the Plan.

Accordingly, the primary Goals & Objectives of the Ashburnham OSRP Update are as follows:

Vision I: Protect Natural Resources using a balanced approach that identifies environmentally and ecologically sensitive or important areas and prioritizes the most valued areas for protection while identifying areas suitable for sustainable development and smart growth.

Vision I, Goal 1: Conduct, create, maintain, and improve inventories and maps of Natural Resources and Conservation Areas for the purpose of prioritizing lands for potential acquisition to protect natural resources.

- Objective A.** Develop and maintain an inventory of priority parcels for possible conservation acquisition, with consideration given to the overall protection of natural resources, critical habitat links and wildlife corridors between protected parcels, upland buffers of wetlands and waterways, and unique, important, or sensitive habitat areas including vernal pools, NHESP designated Natural Communities, Estimated Habitat of Rare Wildlife, and Priority Habitat of Rare Species, and BioMap Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape Elements.
- Objective B.** Create and maintain database and map of Town-owned lands coded by custody of the Conservation Commission, Select Board, Water & Sewer Commission, etc. Include lands with any Conservation Restrictions, noting monitoring responsibilities and activities by the Town (i.e., Conservation Commission) or by other groups.
- Objective C.** Identify best areas for future development that do not conflict with environmentally sensitive areas or important Natural Resources. (See related Vision III, Goal II)
- Objective D.** Identify and seek potential funding sources for the promotion, conservation, and protection of the Town's natural resources and drinking water supply protection areas, including the establishment of a Conservation Fund, and pursuing potential adoption of the Community Preservation Act.

Vision I, Goal 2: Protect Watershed Resources through the management and maintenance of roadside drainage and stormwater outfalls to mitigate pollution, control stormwater runoff, and prevent erosion.

- Objective A.** Inventory streams, rivers, wetlands, water bodies, and aquifer recharge areas. Seek protection for those not included in the Water Supply Overlay District.
- Objective B.** Inventory sensitive areas where the use of salt in the winter should be limited and identify these areas with road signs.
- Objective C.** Develop Best Management Practices and strategies, such as Low Impact Development (LID) and nature-based solutions, for sensitive areas to ensure that stormwater management requirements are achieved to reduce risks and mitigate negative impacts, and to guide municipal activities, such as snow and ice removal in a way that attempts to protect water quality and quantity to the greatest extent practicable.
- Objective D.** Evaluate the effectiveness of the Wetlands Protection Bylaw.
- Objective E.** Identify sources of funding to protect water resources and critical watershed lands.
- Objective F.** Coordinate with Nashua River Watershed Association, Millers River Watershed Council, public school science classes, and local Lake and Pond Associations to establish volunteer water-quality monitoring program to test local waterways at routine intervals to establish and monitor the water quality of Ashburnham's rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds.
- Objective G.** Provide outreach and educational resources on the importance of watershed protection through the Conservation Commission's webpage.

Vision I, Goal 3: Protect Forest & Agricultural Resources through the identification, prioritization, and protection of large tracts of contiguous forest land and agricultural lands with a focus on areas designated as prime forest, prime farmland soils, and farmland of statewide and unique importance.

- Objective A.** Maintain an up-to-date list of Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B lands in order of priority for permanent protection based on conservation value and potential protection of natural resources.
- Be prepared to exercise the municipal Right of First Refusal on parcels identified as high priorities.
 - Conduct annual review to ensure that land and landowner participation is compliant with the Program and that the Town is not missing out on any rightful tax revenue.
- Objective B.** Use Mass Audubon's MAPPR 2.0 Tool or create and maintain a database and map of large contiguous areas of unprotected Prime Agricultural Soils, Prime Forest,

Interior Forest, BioMap Core Forest, and other large or contiguous tracts of unprotected forest and agricultural lands and establish an evaluation and prioritization method for ranking important areas for potential protection.

Objective C. Pursue Forest Legacy Grants for the protection of priority Forest Lands.

Vision II: Improve and maintain Passive and Active Recreational Opportunities to best meet current Community needs and provide high-quality recreational opportunities for all.

Vision II, Goal 1: Provide public access to waterbodies for recreational purposes.

Objective A. Evaluate appropriate and suitable potential locations for public access to waterbodies, particularly those designated as “Great Ponds”, for the following recreational purposes:

- Swimming beach
- Fishing access
- Canoe, Kayak, and Paddleboard access

Objective B. Explore providing necessary amenities for swimming, fishing, and launching canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards at existing, suitable Town-owned water-front properties and/or the shared use of a neighboring Town/City facility.

Objective C. Identify a property suitable for accommodating multiple forms of waterfront recreational activities and assess costs and potential sources of funding to design, develop (or lease), and operate such a waterfront park complex.

Objective D. Communicate with Mass DCR to build stronger relationships and coordination between Town and DCR related to Mount Watatic recreational activity and management issues.

Vision II, Goal 2: Town-wide Trail Enhancements and Network Connectivity: Promote, develop, and maintain a Town-wide trail network that will safely and conveniently connect existing protected parcels of conservation and recreation lands and other important public services and community spaces within Town and to other existing and proposed regional trails.

Objective A. Create a Town-wide Trail Vision Plan, Trail Inventory, and updated Trails Map.

Objective B. Construct and install trailhead kiosks, wayfinding signage, and digital and printed outreach materials including downloadable and interactive online maps to improve Trail visibility, awareness, access, and safety.

Objective C. Explore potential for a new trail within the Town Forest off Russel Hill Road that

connects from the parking area over Russel Hill and beyond connecting to the Midstate Trail and investigate potential connection between Midstate Trail and Jewell Hill (Trustees of Reservations).

Objective D. Improve trail at Bluefield in Ashburnham Town Forest.

Objective E. Create a Trail Stewards or “Friends” Group to maintain and promote Ashburnham’s Trails.

Vision II, Goal 3: Enhance Ashburnham Rail Trail (ART) and Other Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure, Amenities, and Network Connections.

Objective A. Continue to improve and complete the connection from Downtown Ashburnham to South Ashburnham and explore other potential extensions and spurs such as the Cheshire Branch to the North Central Pathway, and connections to schools, parks, playgrounds, recreational fields, and other Open Space & Recreation Lands.

Objective B. Explore options for crossing Willow Brook ravine near Landry Field, via an engineered bridge, elevated multipurpose bridge, or other suitable means of crossing the brook at the roadway or downstream of the ravine without disconnecting the continuity of the trail.

Objective C. Connect the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the entrance at Puffer Street via a side-path along Route 101 or other suitable means.

- Conduct outreach with abutters
- Assess feasibility and pursue necessary steps

Objective D. Continue to pursue improvements to Ashburnham Rail Trail accessibility from Willard Road to Williams Road via a Mass Trails Grant or other potential means.

Objective E. Consider installing a trailhead kiosk within the right-of-way or with landowner permission at the entrance to the Rail Trail off Williams Road.

Objective F. Explore options to connect the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the Cheshire Line or Old County Road, leading to rail trails in Gardner & Winchendon. Multi-use lane will be built in 2025 (MassDOT TIP) connecting Turnpike Rd to the Bresnahan Center.

Vision II, Goal 4: Improve, Maintain, and Expand Parks, Playgrounds, and Recreational Fields, Facilities, and Programs.

Objective A. Improve existing playgrounds, by updating, enhancing, or renovating existing equipment (play structures), features, and amenities, and improving ADA accessibility.

Objective B. Conduct an inventory of existing recreational programs and facilities, documenting location, departmental oversight, or ownership, allowed or intended uses, availability for public use, and current level of usage and scheduling availability.

- Objective C.** Explore the need and potential for a Recreation Department or a Recreation Director or Coordinator position as recommended by the 2022 Parks & Recreation Study Committee.
- Objective D.** Propose the creation of a revolving fund and line item in the Town Budget for recreation and annual budget allotment at Town Meeting as recommended by the 2022 Parks & Recreation Study Committee.
- Objective E.** Seek grants and other funding opportunities for active recreation facilities, fields, and programs.
- Objective F.** Explore the feasibility of additional recreational elements, including low-cost winter activities at existing parks, playgrounds, and open space areas.
- Objective G.** Investigate programming opportunities or additional uses of parks, playgrounds, and open space lands to enhance resident recreational experiences.

Vision III: Preserve the rural and historical character of the Town through the adoption of sustainable land-use practices and a proactive, inclusive, community-based approach to Open Space & Recreation Use, Stewardship, Planning, and Management.

Vision III, Goal 1: Protect scenic or unique Open Space landscapes, vistas, and other important landscape features that contribute to the overall rural character and cultural identity of the Town.

- Objective A.** Update and maintain inventory of important scenic and historic sites and establish priority for protection.
- Objective B.** Seek permanent protection of Town-owned land that are unique & scenic landscapes or important cultural, historical, or recreational sites.
- Objective C.** Provide information and outreach material and links to resources on the webpages of the Ashburnham Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Agricultural Commission for landowners and farmers interested in learning more about the Chapter 61A program.
- Objective D.** Seek permanent protection, through Agricultural Preservation Restrictions or other means of land protection, for unique farmlands and agricultural lands identified as high priorities within the inventory of Chapter 61A lands and for those currently in agricultural use and possessing Prime Farmland Soils.

Vision III, Goal 2: Evaluate the effectiveness and enforceability of all Land Use Protection Zoning Codes, Bylaws, Districts, and Regulations.

Objective A. Review relevant land use protection bylaws, such as the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw, to ensure that they are functional, effective, and enforceable for meeting their intended purposes. Make amendments or revisions as needed.

Objective B. Consider adoption of an Outdoor Lighting Bylaw to reduce light pollution and preserve the towns rural character.

Vision III, Goal 3: Improve communication, inclusion, outreach, and education around conservation of natural resources.

Objective A. Make education and outreach materials and information about available land conservation programs available to owners who are interested or of priority parcels within the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Objective B. Communicate and coordinate with local land trusts, state and regional agencies, adjacent towns, town boards and officials, and other organizations with interest in preserving open space and corridor and expand upon existing partnerships and relationships among agencies and private landowners for the preservation of conservation and recreation land.

Objective D. Educate the public on the benefits and values of open space and promote, encourage, and facilitate the use of public Open Space and Recreation lands.

Vision III, Goal 4: Identify and develop potential sources of funding for Open Space & Recreation Acquisitions.

Objective A. Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act at a rate that is acceptable to the Community.

Objective B. Create a Conservation Fund following the procedures and for said purposes authorized under MGL Chapter 40 Section 8C.

Objective C. Consider an annual request/allotment of funding in the Town Budget for Open Space & Recreation Purposes (or two distinct allotments for conservation and active recreation).

Meeting these Goals & Objectives over the next seven years will require continued, ongoing support and coordination, between relevant stakeholder groups including residents, Town employees, local and regional non-profit organizations, and regional and State agencies. Continued partnerships among these groups will increase the likelihood that the specific actions required to achieve the OSRP goals will be successfully implemented for the benefit of the community.

SECTION 9



Seven-Year Action Plan



Section 9. Seven-Year Action Plan

This Seven-Year Action Plan matrix outlines actions/priorities and a proposed timetable based on the 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan Update goals and objectives. All of the following actions are subject to availability of funding and appropriation. These actions should be reviewed annually, updated, and re-evaluated to ensure consistency with current Community Visions, Needs, and Goals & Objectives. An action plan map is included below the matrix as **Figure 19**.

Key to groups potentially responsible for implementing action items:

AC	Agricultural Commission
AO	Assessor's Office
CC	Conservation Commission and Agent
CEPC	Community Events and Playground Committee (former Parks and Rec)
DPW	Department of Public Works
EDC	Economic Development Council
LT	Land Trusts (esp. Ashburnham Conservation Trust, North County Land Trust)
OSRC	Open Space and Recreation Committee
PB	Planning Board
RTC	Rail Trail Committee
SB	Select Board
WSC	Water/Sewer Commission

Ashburnham OSRP 2023 – 2030 Priority Actions	KEY PARTIES	YEARS						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Vision I: Protect Natural Resources		2023 – '24	2024 – '25	2025 – '26	2026 – '27	2027 – '28	2028 – '29	2029 – '30
1. Develop and maintain an inventory of priority parcels for possible conservation acquisition, with consideration given to the overall protection of natural resources, critical habitat links and wildlife corridors between protected parcels, upland buffers of wetlands and waterways, and unique, important, or sensitive habitat areas including vernal pools, NHESP designated Natural Communities, Estimated Habitat of Rare Wildlife, and Priority Habitat	OSRC, CC, LT	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

of Rare Species, and BioMap Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape Elements.							
2. Create and maintain a database and map of Town-owned lands coded by custody of the Conservation Commission, Select Board, Water & Sewer Commission, etc. Include lands with any Conservation Restrictions, noting monitoring responsibilities and activities by the Town (i.e., Conservation Commission) or by other groups.	OSRC, CC, AO	•	•	•	•	•	•
3. Identify best areas for future development that do not conflict with environmentally sensitive areas or important Natural Resources.	PB, OSRC		•	•	•		
4. Inventory streams, rivers, wetlands, water bodies, and aquifer recharge areas. Seek protection for those not included in the Water Supply Overlay District.	CC, WSC, DPW		•	•	•		
5. Update Best Management Practices and strategies, such as Low Impact Development (LID) and nature-based solutions, for sensitive areas to ensure that stormwater management requirements are achieved to reduce risks and mitigate negative impacts, and to guide municipal activities, such as snow and ice removal in a way that attempts to protect water quality and quantity to the greatest extent practicable.	PB, DPW		•	•	•		
6. Maintain an up-to-date list of Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B lands in order of priority for permanent protection based on conservation value and potential protection of natural resources.	OSRC, LT, AO, AC	•	•	•	•	•	•
7. Provide outreach and educational resources on the importance of watershed protection through the Conservation Commission's webpage.	CC	•	•	•	•	•	•

Vision II: Improve and maintain Passive and Active Recreational Opportunities		2023 – '24	2024 – '25	2025 – '26	2026 – '27	2027 – '28	2028 – '29	2029 – '30
1. Evaluate potential locations for public access to water bodies, particularly those designated as “Great Ponds”, for swimming as well as for fishing, and canoe, kayak, and paddleboard access.	SB	●	●	●	●			
2. Explore providing amenities at existing, suitable Town-owned water-front properties and/or the shared use of a neighboring Town/City facility. Assess costs and potential sources of funding to design, develop (or lease), and operate such a waterfront park complex.	OSRC SB CEPC EDC		●	●	●			
3. Promote, develop, and maintain a Town-wide trail network that will connect existing conservation and recreation lands and other important public spaces within Town and to regional trails.	OSRC, RTC, LT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
4. Create a Town-wide Trail Vision Plan, Trail Inventory, and updated Trails Map.	OSRC, LT	●	●				●	●
5. Construct and install trailhead kiosks, wayfinding signage, and digital and printed outreach materials including downloadable and interactive online maps to improve Trail visibility, awareness, access, and safety.	OSRC, LT, RTC, SB, DPW	●	●	●				
6. Continue to improve and complete the connection from Downtown Ashburnham to South Ashburnham and explore other potential extensions and spurs such as the Cheshire Branch to the North Central Pathway, and connections to schools, parks, playgrounds, recreational fields, and other Open Space & Recreation Lands.	RTC, SB, OSRC, DPW	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

7. Improve existing playgrounds, by updating, enhancing, or renovating existing equipment (play structures), features, and amenities, and improving ADA accessibility.	CEPC, SB, EDC	•	•	•	•			
Vision III: Preserve the rural and historical character of the Town		2023 – '24	2024 – '25	2025 – '26	2026 – '27	2027 – '28	2028 – '29	2029 – '30
1. Provide information and outreach material and links to resources on the webpages of the Ashburnham Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Agricultural Commission for landowners and farmers interested in learning more about the Chapter 61A program.	CC, OSRC, AC	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
2. Seek permanent protection, through Agricultural Preservation Restrictions or other means of land protection, for unique farmlands and agricultural lands identified as high priorities within the inventory of Chapter 61A lands and for those currently in agricultural use and possessing Prime Farmland Soils.	CC, OSRC, AC	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3. Review relevant land use protection bylaws, such as the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw, to ensure that they are functional, effective, and enforceable for meeting their intended purposes. Make amendments or revisions as needed.	PB, SB							
4. Educate the public on the benefits and values of open space and promote, encourage, and facilitate the use of public Open Space and Recreation lands.	CC, OSRC, AC		•			•		

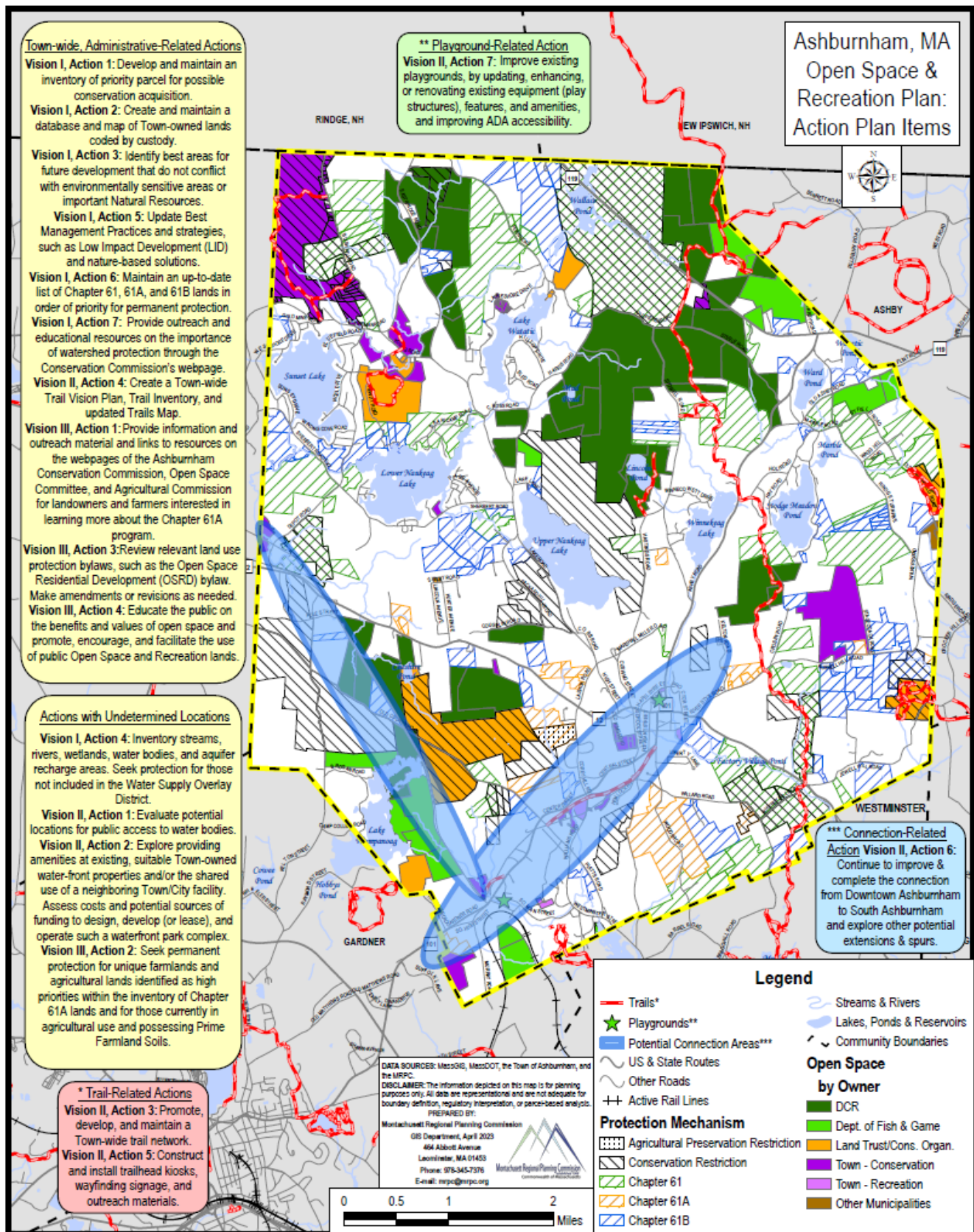


Figure 19. Ashburnham OSRP 2023 Action Plan Map

SECTION 10

Public Comments



SECTION 10

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following section includes Letters of Review from various local Town of Ashburnham Boards and Committees, including the Select Board (and/or Chief Elected Official), Planning Board, and Conservation Commission, and other relevant Boards and Committees and interested stakeholders who choose to submit a review letter or comments. In addition, public comments gathered from the public survey or received in writing as part of the public comment period, and a letter of review from the Regional Planning Agency, as recommended by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, are also included.

Insert Select Board Letter of Review Here

Insert Select Board Letter of Review Here

Insert Planning Board Letter of Review Here

Insert Conservation Commission Letter of Review Here

Insert any additional Letters of Review Here

- Insert MRPC Letterhead for RPA Letter of Review -

DATE

Melissa Cryan

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Division of Conservation Services

100 Cambridge St, 9th Floor

Boston, MA 02114

Dear Ms. Cryan:

I am writing to inform you that I have reviewed and participated in the preparation of the 2023 update to Ashburnham's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). I would like to offer my enthusiastic support. The plan provides valuable data that will aid town boards and committees in their decision-making, and provide citizens and community members, as well as the MRPC, with useful background information about their town's open space and recreation opportunities.

The OSRP effectively lays out the town's goals for protection of natural assets, provision for public recreation, and maintenance of the tranquil, rural atmosphere for which Ashburnham is known. I feel that the Plan thoroughly addresses issues and concerns affecting these goals in the future, as well as providing a detailed background of the town, a comprehensive inventory of existing resources, and a thoughtful roadmap for the next seven-years. On behalf of the MRPC, I am giving my full support towards the adoption of the plan and the realization of the recommendations expressed therein.

Sincerely,

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission

Glenn Eaton, Executive Director

PUBLIC SURVEY

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Several of the public survey questions provided a place for comment or “other” responses. Below is a summary of those additional comments or other responses along with the original survey questions they pertain to. For a more detailed summary of the survey questions and results, please refer to Appendix B and Section 6 of the Plan, respectively.

3. Which recreational activities do you and your family/household regularly participate in? Check any that apply.

Others listed:

- Archery and Rifles
- Bird Watching
- Camping (X3)
- Dance
- Disc golf
- Ice hockey (X2)
- Field hockey (X2)
- Deck/Street Hockey (X3)
- Filling potholes... roads very bad to walk or drive
- Frisbee
- Keeping nature natural!!!!!!
- Pickle Ball
- Snowshoeing
- Reading in beautiful places
- Rollerblading
- Scooter
- Segways
- Snowshoeing (X2)
- Volleyball (X2)
- Lacrosse

4. Select up to 5 (five) CONSERVATION LANDS that are MOST IMPORTANT to you (if any).

Others listed:

- Behind Oakmont. I'm not sure what it's called.

- Woods behind and around Overlook and Oakmont schools/Whitman Reservoir. (Parts of High Ridge Wildlife Refuge)
- Not sure of name, but off if 140 in Gardner, wildlife viewing area. Walk roads where psychiatric hospital used to be.
- Blood Hill
- Doucette Property (ACT; X2)
- Old County Rd
- Old County Road and Cheshire Railroad Bed to Lake Wampanoag
- What I feel is most important are not isolated specific areas, but rather the large contiguous tracts that afford the best corridors and unfragmented habitats for wildlife passage and survival. Additionally the watershed protection is paramount given our location as the head waters of 3 major watersheds. The fact that some of them have trails is very much appreciated but superfluous to the greater goals that these large tracts serve.
- Not other, but we just don't know a lot about these areas.
- Not familiar with most of these.
- I fight for Nature!!!!
- Anywhere except north central Massachusetts.

5. Select up to 5 (five) CULTURAL and MUNICIPAL RESOURCES that are MOST IMPORTANT to you for recreation.

- Others listed:
- Briggs Pond & old town pool area
- Creative Connections Art Gallery and programs (X2)
- Stevens Memorial Library (X4 responses)
- Bad Roads
- Save Nature wherever it exists!!!!!!
- The scenic roadways are spoiled by dead trees that can't be cut or pruned.

7. Which specific open space and recreation resources should the town PRIORITIZE for FUTURE INVESTMENT, if any? Select only your top 5, at most.

Others listed:

- "Paved recreational area where people can walk/jog along the lakes scenic view.
- Splashpad for kids in the summer "
- More sidewalks
- Develop the bike trails
- ATV and Side by Side Trails
- ATV/Dirt Bike Trails
- DESIGNATED ATV and snowmobile trails
- Cleaning up Briggs Pond- this was always maintained by parks & recreation. Cleaning up old town pool area- not necessarily for swimming, as the cost, back in the 80s was outrageous to fix the damn

- Community open air art installations
- Dog park (X 4 surveys)
- Outdoor MOVIES
- Pave the damn roads! That should be the number 1 priority. That and new town electeds and appointeds that understand roads are the one and only priority.
- protect the people who walk or drive on the town roads first! THE ROADS ARE NOT SAFE
- Preserve Nature!!!!!!!!
- Public Motorized Boat Access

8. Use this space for any other comments for the Open Space and Recreation Committee.

- There should be an outdoor basketball court at Winchester park
- Public access to swimming and kyaking and fixing Winchester Park playground are top priorities
- It's time the town invests in its youth and give the playgrounds much needed attention
- Leave Winchester park as it is
- Out playgrounds need TLC!!!!
- We have awful playgrounds. It is sad to know that I take my kids out of town to meet with other people from town to do playgroups. The equipment is old, broken and looks dangerous. Please prioritize the playground equipment at both parks
- We should have basketball courts downtown and sidewalks downtown
- Athletic fields should be one option, with demand deciding the proportion of funds for each. Our family used both soccer & softball when the kids played; we need to keep all four sports field types available.
- We need a dog park!
- A resource/website with where all the public space is would be helpful, or if one exists then better marketing of it. Most of what we've found has been word of mouth or All Trails.
- Committee needs to be more active and visible to be effective.
- We have too many areas that are hard to get to or use.
- It's important to not privatize all the lakes. Specially in the summer time is difficult to find a place where one can refresh specially with kids.
- I was not aware of many of the outdoor spaces available per this survey or that residents who do not live on the lakes could actually have access to swimming, canoeing and kayaking on the lakes. Where is that located and is their parking available?
- Public access to swimming and kayaking and fixing Winchester Park playground are top priorities
- We have many lakes in Ashburnham and we have no access to swim or boat or picnic. About time we make it happen
- Rail trail south ash to north Ash would connect all the way to Winchendon and southern NH. Roads are no longer safe for walking or biking due to distracted drivers and poor road conditions.
- Please connect the Ashburnham Rail Trail (bottom of Willard) to the town center. It is dangerous to bike/walk into town even if it's a short distance to where the sidewalk starts. Paving the Rail Trail is my top pick otherwise.
- We should connect to regional bike trails/paths, and especially to the commuter rail in Fitchburg
- Connection trails between states for ATV use
- The town needs trails for OHV. Anything that teens can participate in and keep them out of trouble.

- Public hunting access
- Preserve history of Native Americans and African Americans who lived here long ago
- I'd like to see more parades/pageants/gatherings. Also other historic markers other than war memorials, like Native American contributions, historic buildings etc. Much more public art installations and art shows, fairs and events
- Too much lawn in front of town hall. Can be much better utilized.
- We must keep Our Town as natural as possible!!!!!!!
- With Ashburnham's limited resources and portions of green space being used for more single-family housing, I think a better use of funds would be for things that promote more inclusivity of all ages and abilities, and makes use of what we already have prior to converting more space (more ADA compliance to existing sites and resources, maintenance of "active recreational areas" dependent on use and interest to encourage active lifestyles for all ages, community garden for collaborative effort that is not only in conjunction with the summer farmer's market on Cushing St. and general "feel" of Ashburnham's demographic, but also may have some positive sway in the eyes of the state regarding green/reduced-carbon/sustainable initiatives come budget season.
- Would rather see the town fix the roads and bring industry to Ashburnham
- Stop wasting tax payer money fix the roads first!!!
- Thank you for your efforts
- Thank you for your time and commitment
- Thanks for caring enough to as

PUBLIC REVIEW OF THE DRAFT PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Insert any public comments received in writing during the 21-day public review and comment period of the Final Draft of the 2023 OSRP Update.

SECTION 11



References



SECTION 11

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APPENDICES



